



TO THE READER

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THE LABOUR LEADER

PERSONS

<i>John Dempsey</i>	-	<i>Chairman of Strike Committee</i>
<i>Tim Murphy</i>	-	{ <i>Representative of coal porters on Strike Committee</i>
<i>Phil Kennedy</i>	-	
<i>David Lombard</i>	-	<i>Member of Strike Committee</i>
	-	<i>Secretary of Quaymen's Union</i>
<i>John Clarke</i>	-	{ <i>Representative of Workmen's Federation on Strike Com- mittee</i>
<i>James O'Sullivan</i>	-	
<i>1st Workman</i>	-	{ <i>Quay labourers</i>
<i>2nd Workman</i>	-	
<i>3rd Workman</i>	-	
<i>Jack O'Donoghue</i>	-	<i>Quay labourer</i>
<i>Dan O'Reilly</i>	-	<i>Coal porter</i>
<i>Battie O'Donovan</i>	-	{ <i>Caretaker of Quaymen's Union Hall</i>
<i>Mrs O'Donovan</i>	-	<i>His wife</i>
<i>Mrs Tobin</i>		
<i>Caretaker of Athenæum Hall</i>		
<i>Other Workmen</i>		

SCENE I.—Committee room of Quaymen's Union

SCENE II.—The same

SCENE III.—Room behind stage of Athenæum Hall

TIME—Act I.—Night

Act II.—Afternoon of next day

Act III.—Same night

The Labour Leader
A Play in Three Acts

To
CON. O'LEARY

Author of "The Crossing," "Queer Ones," etc.

In remembrance of our earliest adventures
in footlights, curtains, dressers, and helmets

Com-05 AL-77 17

The Labour Leader

A Play in Three Acts

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89 TALBOT STREET

LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN LTD.

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1920

C 79 L

6360

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PREFACE

SINCE it is as good to be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, anyone who has written a play may surely attempt a preface, the preface, and not the play, being the thing nowadays, as everyone knows.

What is the idea of the lengthy preface? Is it that the really important things cannot be got into the body of the play itself? or does the playwright fear that without his preface the reader might take in his play with abruptness and emptiness, and not with decency and well-being? Or would the playwright make us free of his workshop, his rough planks, his nails, his glue? Or does he mean his preface to carry not any one but all three of these burdens: does he mean it to give us that part of his mind—quite a large part!—he has not wedged up within his three or four acts, to warm our minds to match his own when in the frenzy of creation, to show the very solid and well-attested ground this frenzy of his careers upon? . . . Is it necessary?

If it is necessary, what of the plain man who carelessly strolls into the theatre in the old-fashioned way — sans preface? Does he make a mistake in going there at all, since there he can only come at so little a part of the author's mind and its stores of information? Of old the mere playgoer was of some importance: the dramatist trembled before him and tried to please him; it was before him he laid his wares, such as they were; he even looked upon him as a law-giver! But to-day he must be of no importance, or else the playwright would have his lengthy preface read out to him, or flashed upon the screen, paragraph by paragraph. To-day, without any sense of outrage, we may even think of the dramatist as looking scornfully at his audience from the moth holes in the curtain and saying: "The fools, they ought to know that here I am not to be found in my fulness, that indeed this business of footlights and bustle is only a sort of penny-gaff advertisement of my book, where alone is the full strength of me" (and his mind, revisiting his preface of a hundred pages, brings a happiness back into his eyes).

Take another case: a man a little less plain who, knowing that the preface is the thing,

yet somehow or other finds himself in the theatre, without having read it. Is he sinning against the light? And is his punishment immanent in his sin?—for what confusion and division there must be in the mind of such a man! As the play goes on, how is he to help himself wondering what the nature of the preface may be—and, since wonder is ever the mother of creation, how is he to prevent himself from attempting to write that very preface he had thought to do without! (And it is easier to read prefaces, even the longest of them, than to write even the shortest of them.) Then see him rush to the actual preface, the play being done, and compare it with that *he* now has brought written in his mind. And having read the actual preface, having really discovered the deep places of the author's mind, is he to rush off to the theatre again that he may see the play aright, and judge it anew? Confusion and division of mind, truly. But perhaps it is right that the pleasures of a complex day be themselves complex. In the old days one went to the theatre and saw the moonlight brought into a chamber, but now one must rather take the chamber, and all the dried fruits of it, into the moonlight. Our

labour-saving devices threaten us with brain fag.

Sometimes one wonders if these prefaces are intended to be the prose of the matter, the superficies ; the play, the poetry of the matter, the heart of it. But then one reads the plays. . . . !

Such prefaces are beyond me. Great must be the vigour of those others who, having finished their play, sit down and write a preface twice as long, and oftentimes twice as good. But perhaps they write the preface first. There is a saying attributed to an old Greek dramatist : "I have the play made, except to write the verses." May we think of a modern equivalent to this as running : "I have my drama written, except the play ?"

THE LABOUR LEADER

A Play in Three Acts

ACT I

TIME—*About ten o'clock on an autumn night.*

SCENE—*Committee Room of Quaymen's Union. A long table covered with baize, on which are strewn papers, ink, etc. Some chairs—many of them in disrepair—forms, etc. Strike literature hangs on walls. The room is large, shabby, and badly kept. Door on back at right, another on the left.*

At rise of curtain JOHN DEMPSEY, JOHN CLARKE, and TIM MURPHY are in different parts of the room in attitudes expressive of anxiety.

Mur. (petulantly). Be patient awhile. After all, ye're only guessing. And when you think a thing is going to happen in a certain way—well, doesn't it happen in the other way? (calling out) Battie! Battie!

Clar. (mournfully). 'Twould be a good thing for us if it was only guessing we were.

Mur. (flinging out the words). What else is it but guessing?

[*Mrs O'DONOVAN, a miserable-looking woman, enters meekly. Without looking round Tim Murphy continues:*

'Tis a wonder ye ever came. Look at that fire.

Mrs O'D. I beg yer pardon; 'tis how himself isn't well on me.

Mur. (looking round at her). And I beg ye'rs. I thought 'twas himself I had. The old complaint, ma'am? (*Mrs O'Donovan gives a mournful sigh.*) 'Tis the way we're froze, and that fire is going out. If you'd put a shovelful of coal on it——

Mrs O'D. I will then.

[*Mrs O'Donovan goes out.*

Clar. 'Tis a momentous night for all of us as well as for the Quaymen's Union.

Mur. (with some humour). 'Tis kind of ye to remind us.

Demp. But Mr Clarke is right, Tim. If the railway men don't come out I don't know what will happen. I see quite plainly that

we should have given this job to Phil Kennedy—to Phil alone. He's a softener; and that's what these railway men want: some one to coax them at the beginning, tell them how important they are, praise their solidarity; and Davna won't do that. He'll do the other thing. He'll lose his temper.

Mur. Likely enough. We're out for the last six weeks, and there's these railway fellows handling the tainted stuff all the time—no wonder Davna would lose his temper!

Demp. He will; he always loses it. We had a right to keep him here while this business was on! And he's particularly offensive lately.

Mur. He's tired—that's what's the matter with him; but then he's often at his best when he's like that.

Demp. Often at his worst, too.

Mur. Look, Clarke, did ye ever see a fellow would be rotten sick after a feed of drink, holding his head in his hands, and yet all the time keeping the whole gang in stretches? "I'm sick, I'm sick," he says, and then he remembers some other fellow was just as sick or even sicker, and how something happened to him, and he can't help

telling it—did ye ever see a man like that?—sick, but with the whisky working in him all the same; working! working! Well, Davna's like that: sick and all as he is . . . he's worth——

Clar. (impatiently). Yes, yes.

Mur. Wait now. He's sick and tired, so he is; but the stuff is in him all the time.

Clar. But Davna doesn't imbibe—I never heard——

Mur. Of course you didn't! Will we ever get that bit of coal?

Demp. He'll snap at these railway men and they'll cut up rusty, and where are we then?

Mur. If they do, then there's comrade Phil standing by—Phil the fluter, Phil the softener, to tell them a little story—"Hush-a-bye, baby," says Phil, "on the tree top"——

Clar. (sententiously). Phil is a very useful man. The very virtues of our leader plunge him into committing errors; he's a headlong man, that's what he is, and therefore it is necessary to have a man like Phil at his side—David Lombard and Philip Kennedy—a great combination.

Demp. Yes, but our headlong leader

sometimes forgets that Phil is at his side : we should have left this night's business to Phil alone.

Mur. Phil is all right. But as for doing the business alone . . . Mr Clarke is right. Together they're best. When Davna is splashing his words about, as if they cost him nothing, and everybody is flattened out trying to keep up with him, well, then, there's Phil Kennedy standing by, and he takes up a little of the stuff Davna is splashing about like mad, and he puts it into a little glass and says : " Here, boys, ye won't refuse this little *taosgan*, will ye ? " And off they swallow it. But 'tis Davna makes the stuff all the same. . . . We'll never get that bit of coal. The poor woman can't get the keys from him, that's how 'tis.

Clar. (puzzled). You mean that Phil is more skilful than Davna in putting the wares on the market ?

Mur. (looks a moment at him, then turns away and shouts). Battie ! Battie ! Give the woman the keys or I'll go down and hammer ye ! Here she is (*to the others*). Would you believe me, I'm froze with sitting with me back to that door.

[*Enter Mrs O'DONOVAN with coal.*]

Mur. (going towards her). Give it to me, ma'am. That's all right, thank ye.

Mrs O'D. (suddenly turning and making for door). Go 'way down out of that. I told ye he wasn't here. Look, sir (to Tim Murphy). Look at him!

DAN O'REILLY, a rough-looking, drunken quay labourer, lurches into the room and holds out his hand to John Clarke.

D. O'R. Give it to me, me hearty. Put it there. [He follows Clarke about.

Clar. (avoiding him). Yes, yes. As I was saying, Mr Dempsey—(to D. O'R.)—you might go home, my good man.

D. O'R. Jakus!—sure 't isn't Davna at all I have! Look at that for ye! What a mistake I made! Where is he? Tell me, wan of ye!

Demp. 'Tis all right. Davna isn't here.

D. O'R. Don't ye see I'm . . . dying to give him a lift? Most important business—most important. There's not another man in Cork . . . knows a word about it—'tis terrible!

Mur. (assuagingly). Davna is on very important business himself; 'aith, we're all on very important business these times—

D. O'R. Aren't we?—aren't we, 'Tim? But, O Lor!—I'm bursting with me secret, that's what I am.

Mur. (*leading him out*). But, Davna—'tis how he's . . . he's haranguing the railway men—*haranguing* them to bring them out with us.

D. O'R. Jakus, he is! O jakus—he's harang . . . harang . . . railway men and all! And I wanting him like mad!—the lovely man!

Mur. Ah, he didn't know you were coming to see him; sure didn't he tell me he didn't know.

D. O'R. Did he now, did he now? And I have—jakus—and I having a story the length of that to tell him.

[He holds his hands apart.

Mur. 'Tis a great pity, and he only talking about ye this evening and all——

D. O'R. And he mentioned me by name?

Mur. He did. "Dan O'Reilly," he says, "is it dead he is that he never comes near me at all?"

D. O'R. He said that! He did! The lovely man! Ah, me little tar, 'tis he's the boy for them—look, he'll wipe the floor with them—the Merching Princes of the City of

Cork! (*he suddenly lurches over to Dempsey*). Ye're looking very sad and downhearted-like; but, look, if ye only knew the story I have inside in me breast, locked up (*he strikes his breast a great blow*), ye'd be forty thousand times as bad! Isn't that terrible!

[*He looks at the others with glaring eyes.*]

Mur. Come on, now, and I'll tell him ye'll call again.

D. O'R. Do. But I'll wait for him below. And I'm drunk again. After all me promises, I'm as drunk as Bacchus! We're a terrible race, a terrible race. But look, I have a good excuse for it this time, haven't I? He won't say a word to me, I have such a story for him. I'll collar him below and he coming in—— [Murphy *helps him out.*]

Mrs O'D. (*to John Clarke*). Indeed, sir, I couldn't help leaving him up; I was afraid he'd upset the bit of coal on me.

Clar. (*pompously*). I'm only a visitor here. You needn't take my feelings into account, I assure you.

Mrs O'D. Yes, sir, I know that.

Demp. 'Tis all right, Mrs O'Donovan.

[*Mrs O'Donovan goes out.*]

Haranguing the railway men, that's just it; and it isn't the right thing.

Re-enter TIM MURPHY.

Mur. Here's another. 'Tis Jack O'Donoghue. 'Tis all up!

[He shakes his head in disgust.]

Demp. Where is he? He's not as bad as the last, I hope.

Mur. I'll call him in to ye.

[He makes wearily for door.]

Clar. How could he have any news?

Mur. Well, there's such things as key-holes! But he's a poor softy of a man at the best. Come on in, Jack.

Enter JACK O'DONOGHUE, a commonplace looking workman, with wonder in his eyes.

Mur. (to Dempsey). Maybe you'd speak to him.

Demp. Is it news you have?

O'Don. There's something up.

[He likes to speak in whispers. He keeps his cap in his hand and jerks it about nervously and quickly.]

Demp. Yes; where?

O'Don. At the Conference.

Demp. How do you know?

O'Don. I'll tell ye; a railway man told me. His name is Duggan.

Demp. But how did he know?

O'Don. Wasn't he at it—at the Conference, I mean. Didn't he come out. Wait now and I'll tell ye. There we were, all of us, with our backs again' the railings opposite, and we looking up at the Hall. 'Twas lighted up fine, but the blinds were all down, and we couldn't see nothing, only Davna and he hammering the table and giving them hell.

Clar. What, the railway men?

Demp. But the man who told you?

O'Don. Wait now, let ye. There were three men keeping tally at the door. And then the door opened. And this man come out—and he took a few steps up the street, and a few steps down the street. And faith that didn't do him neither. What did he do then but come over to us, and we all watching him. And he said nothing, but went along us all and then he picked me out, and I not knowing the heavens over him. "You're O'Donoghue?" he said. "The same," said I; and then he whispers to me secret-like, "Run like hell and

bring up Phil Kennedy or ye're done for." Well, I didn't wait for the second word——

Demp. Then Phil isn't with him at all?

[They cluster about him, except Murphy, who has heard the story already.]

Clar. You could tell by the tone of Mr Lombard's voice that he was angry and excited?

O'Don. He could be heard up at the bridge—and he shouting like a stevie.

Demp. 'Tis all up, I'm afraid.

Mur. 'Tis how he couldn't stand their talkey-talk. I knew he couldn't. Why isn't Phil with him—just to keep a hand on the pressure-gauge? Oh, there'll be a fine kick-up now. I'll never forgive him (*to Jack O'Donoghue*). That'll do. You don't know any more?

O'Don. But I'd like to have an answer. Where's Phil Kennedy?

Mur. We thought he was with Davna. If he's not, we don't know where he is.

Demp. Very well, Jack. Yes, you have done your part. If Phil comes in we'll send him up.

O'Don. Good-night. I must go back and tell the man at the door. I'll report again

to ye if there's any news. Good-night, now.

Demp. Do so. Very well—good-night.

[*Jack O'Donoghue goes out.*]

We're done. The game's up.

[*He sits back in a chair, tired.*]

Mur. But 'twas a railway man came out and sent for Phil—I count that a good sign. That's hopeful.

Demp. 'Tis—but the rest of the story?

Clar. Davna mustn't know the railway men if he's talking to them like that. They're not like your men—they're not casuals——

Mur. (*bitterly*). Thank you kindly for reminding us. [*He turns his back on Clarke.*]

Demp. What use is it snapping at people?

Mur. Davna not know the railway men!—and he does, I suppose (*nods backwards at Clarke*).

Enter BATTIE, a man with one arm. He is under the influence of drink. He is cool and impertinent by nature.

Bat. I came up to ye to apologise for my dilynquency (*he sucks the word, as if he enjoyed bringing it out*)—my dilynquency. They're after telling me below——

Mur. (making for him, anxious to relieve his mind on some one). Go down out of this, yourself and your dilynquency.

Bat. (avoiding him). Ye're very hard on me. I know ye're my employers—my legal and lawful employers—and the greatest respect is due to ye——

Mur. If ye don't go down I'll pitch ye down. I'll tell Davna how you're after tormenting us this day——

Bat. Ah, there's a lot of ye, and if ye had the power, I know how ye'd use it. Ye'd be worse than the old gang, so ye would. And yet there's many a thing and many a secret ye don't know—many——

Demp. Shut him outside that door——

Bat. He needn't; I'm going. I'm after apologising for me dilynquency, and there's no more to be said—although I see I might have spared meself the trouble. And if ye were more agreeable-like, maybe we'd be all sitting now at our ease and listening to what I have to tell ye—howsomever—since ye don't want me, no more than ye wanted poor Danno Reilly——

[*He goes, having arranged one or two chairs in their places while he was speaking.*]

Demp. Mr Clarke, you see how 'tis; Davna is too much for us. There's one of his pets just gone out. It would take a small revolution to dismiss that old sot from his job here. I don't suppose we could do it. Well, it's quite plain what must be done with Davna, sooner or later. We must put a check on him. His tongue runs away with him. If he messes this business of the railway men, we must just put that check on him to-night——

Mur. (snapping). But when he won't have a secretary. That's what you're coming at, isn't it?

Clar. (calmly). You're right, Mr Dempsey. There are many things Davna can do with great aptitude, but he's not a diplomatist.

[*He looks wisely at Dempsey.*]

Mur. But isn't there Phil always with him; isn't he as good as a secretary?

Demp. Where is he to-night?—and the whole strike trembling in the balance.

Mur. But hold awhile. How do you know what news he'll bring us himself from the Conference—can't ye wait——

Clar. There's O'Donoghue's story—and that man's hint—and the first fellow—what do you call him?

THE LABOUR LEADER

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Mur. Danno!—nobody minds him!

Demp. Phil is not an official; he's only a committee man. If he isn't with Davna to-night at the railway men's—well, we can't come down on him. So you see, Tim, he's not exactly the same as a private secretary would be, is he?

Mur. Hold awhile. The two of them were seen going down the Main street at seven o'clock——

Demp. Yes, and Davna at the last minute sends him on a wild-goose chase; gets him out of the way so that he might have a free hand for himself. I know him. Well, we must put a stop to it. We'll give him a private secretary—a bridle, if you like. We just have to. Anyway, he's about flattened out. He's taking no interest at all in these accounts. You're after seeing the state the books are in?

Clar. Awful! The Federation wouldn't tolerate it for a moment.

Mur. When we have little or no money, what's the use of keeping accounts? I don't see much use in it anyway.

Clar. 'Tisn't for me to interfere; but I can say with confidence that if Phil Kennedy held some official position in your society,

our fellows would be more hearty in the fight. Mr Lombard takes too much on himself. We don't forget what happened in Limerick——

Mur. (seeing his chance). What happened in Limerick? Why, nothing at all would have happened there if only Davna got his own way. But they wouldn't give it to him. No, he must have a secretary—one to take the money and the other to give the receipts—and in the heel of the hunt there was neither money nor receipts. There's what happened in Limerick. And now Naylor is in quad—the proper place for him, the scab! And ye're not satisfied!

Clar. I would point out to you that it was the individual was at fault. Naylor wasn't straight.

Mur. But if you appoint anyone you'll have to appoint an individual, I expect. You can't appoint a whole regiment, can you?

Clar. Ah—eh—of course, of course. But choose your individual. After all, two heads are better than one—especially in diplomacy.

Mur. Oh aye! Two heads—Battie's and Danno's—two lovely heads—true for ye. One of them, not to mind the two of them,

would think of things God Almighty Himself couldn't fathom (*he laughs at his vision*).

Clar. But you know I'm right. I'm not used to be laughed at. [*He is quite angry.*

Mur. But when he won't have a secretary? I know what he'll answer ye: "Cage me up," he'll say; "Clip the eagle's wings," he'll say; "Sprig me with bird lime," he'll say; and what'll ye answer? Ye can't answer; ye'll have no answer——

Demp. But the man is flattened out from overwork—you know that.

Clar. And why should he say such foolish things as these you mention?

Mur. (*staring at him*). Because he will! And (*to Dempsey*) 'tis true he's flattened out, but give him a—a—a stimulant—just one—and he'll do more work in an hour than the rest of us together in a week—whisky is whisky, old boy——

Clar. But you said he didn't drink—and I never saw the signs of it——

Mur. Why should he drink? The whisky's in him all the time. God put it there. I often drank a glass of him—heady stuff, make you wink. Now, take your time; let the railway men drink it. Maybe 'twill upset them, but wait, just wait! (*call-*

ing out) Battie! Battie!—me poor voice is going from me. Give a shout, hard, and 'tis his wife will answer. As for these account books—Davna will straighten them out for us all right—Battie!

[*He shouts impatiently.*]

Demp. What do you want him for?—when he's quiet——

Mur. Battie! You son of a lout. (*To Dempsey.*) Don't ye see, that Child of Misfortune was here a minute ago, we shouldn't have let him out—he'll be spreading that story of his all over the city.

Enter Mrs O'DONOVAN.

Mrs O'D. Were ye calling, sir?

Mur. Is that Jack O'Donoghue gone? Is he below? Is the three of them there?

Mrs O'D. Who do ye mean?

Mur. Danno and O'Donoghue and your—your spouse!

Mrs O'D. They are, sir. God help us, they're all together in the kitchen. I can't do a hand's turn with them.

Mur. If ye have any stout——

Mrs O'D. I could get ye a bottle—or a dozen——

Mur. No, ma'am; whisky for me. But

if ye have any stout below give it to O'Donoghue till he's speechless; pour it down his throat till he's spifflo. And if Danno sits on him then, let him.

Mrs O'D. You're joking.

Mur. I'm not, ma'am. Keep him there in—in—conversation with Danno till neither of them can see the other fellow—do that now, like a good woman.

Mrs O'D. Very well, sir. There's a lot of the men gathering round the door; Danno wants to fight them. They're waiting for news to come from the railway men.

[The three men look at one another.]

Demp. 'Tis quite certain they'll have the news before we will.

Clar. That's what I complain of. Everything in connection with this place is done very loosely—no order——

Mur. (*comically wringing his hands*). No law, no order—not a bit!

Demp. Tell them, Mrs O'Donovan, there'll be no decision to-night. By all accounts there won't. You're right, Clarke—no law, no order—that what's up with us.

Enter PHIL KENNEDY, a pleasant-looking, well-set-up man with a blonde com-

plexion and fair hair. He blocks the passage as Mrs O'Donovan is passing through, then bows and apologises with natural gracefulness.

Phil. Pardon me, ma'am ; please pardon—and good-night (*exit Mrs O'Donovan ; Phil holding door for her*). Good-night all—Davna's not come, I see?

Demp. You weren't at the Conference—we have just heard so. 'Tis very unfortunate——

Phil. Davna didn't want me there. Besides, I had no mandate ; that's what seemed to strike him at the last moment. What could I do? But 'twill be all right—the railway men are quite willing, really well disposed.

Demp. They *were* well disposed ; whether they are is another matter.

Phil. What do you mean?

Demp. It seems Davna is giving them hell——

Phil. Lord! Lord! How serious you are! Here you are here, all with long faces! Below stairs there are the three of them, thick as thieves, with three bottles of stout and great talk—as happy!

as happy! And there's Davna giving the railway fellows hell—O Lord! that's real good. Don't you see the three pictures, Clarke? Oh, you can't, *you're* one of them!

Clar. I think 'tis a very serious business.

Phil. Oh, so 'tis, so 'tis. And I really suspected something of the sort. As we went along Davna was muttering to himself—I suppose a few stunning phrases were coming into that royal head of his! And suddenly he dismisses me, sends me to his digs with some silly papers——

Mur. You should have stuck on to him——

Phil. How could I? Besides, he's in no humour for argument. He's run down—and he's more infallible than ever when he's like that. Worry and annoyance frees him from the worldly wisdom that makes a man dull—so he says.

Mur. John, here, is insisting on giving him a secretary——

Phil. 'Tisn't a new story. Poor secretary! He'd want to have wings, I guess.

Demp. But it'll be done to-night—Clarke there thinks so, too.

Clar. The Workmen's Federation which I represent——

Mur. Oh, aye!

Clar. . . . are unanimous on the matter. Furthermore, there's no man we'd like to see in the position so much as yourself, Phil.

Phil. I! I, Davna's sec.! I—'twould be comedy——

Mur. If he must have a sec.—mind you, Phil, I'm dead against it—wouldn't you take it, Phil? He knows you. You know him. Take it, Phil—and things will be very much as they are——

Phil. Ah, no—don't ask me. 'Twould never work. In friendship there's a certain amount of give and take; he slangs me; I slang back; it blows over. But official and official—that's different. I agree that a sec. might be a very good thing for his own sake. I had an idea that something might go wrong to-night. But how do you know?

Demp. Jack O'Donoghue was here looking for you. A railway man sent him.

Mur. They're the devil for a drop of oil, a greasing rag——

Phil. When was this?

Demp. Quarter of an hour since.

Phil. Am I better go there? Could I get there in time? [*He looks at his watch.*]

Demp. No use; you'll be late.

Mur. Go there, Phil, for Davna's sake. If he frightens off these railway chaps 'twill be serious.

Phil. Very well then, I'll go.

Demp. But if this Conference breaks down I'll insist at our committee meeting to-night on giving him a secretary; it will be a sort of reorganisation of our forces; besides, it may help to cover up this collapse of the railway men.

Phil. That's wise, that's good. But the railway men are all right; you'll see they are. Our fellows are out for the sake of Trade Unionism, not for anything else; and the railway men see that they are killing Trade Unionism in not supporting them. They're really well disposed.

Demp. Don't come back here. Go to the Workmen's Federation. We start the meeting there at eleven. We'll make the appointment there.

Phil. I'll report there? Very well.

Mur. But surely you won't tackle Davna to-night? How could you? Why, he'll be like an old rag. It wouldn't be fair.

Demp. But it must be done. If we have bad news to-night, the story will be all over the city in the morning: where are we then? Our only chance is to be ready to announce to-morrow morning that our forces have been reorganised overnight, and that the struggle is now to begin in earnest.

Phil. Well, I'm off—good-night.

[*Phil goes out.*]

Mur. And if ye give him a secretary his job will be to cut Davna off when he's giving us the history of Ireland in the tenth century, or giving us Shelley: "Rise like lions after slumber"; "Shake your manes like thunder"; "Ye are many, they are few!" He was a great lad—a great lad, that Shelley, and he only a poor sheep of an Englishman and all. And what would we know about him only for Davna? Or about the Red Flag? Or about anything at all. And now ye're plotting to down him!

Clar. We're plotting nothing, Mr Murphy—we're not that sort——

Mur. Of course not, ye're above it.

Clar. I think Phil will take that very important post all right; he only needs a little pressing, and I think that's a very happy ending to our—our diplomacy——

Mur. If he accepts Phil as secretary I won't grumble, but if he don't—more plotting, more plotting!

Demp. We'll have to find another—that's all.

Mur. You will not.

Demp. Oh, yes, we will.

Mur. Surely not to-night?

Clar. If Phil doesn't take it, there's Corbett——

Mur. Corbett! He drinks like a fish. If Davna got a whiff of him in the condition he was in here last night in this room, why, he'd throw him down the stairs, body and bones!

Demp. Yes, but he's a capable fellow for all that. And there's Sullivan, a well read man, a capable man with a pen——

Mur. You're joking!

Demp. I'm not. He can write a letter as good as any lawyer in Ireland.

Mur. Lord! Lord!—Sullivan! Davna and Sullivan!—Fire and water! Whisky and whey! No, John, no. If he swallows Phil, very good. If not, drop it—drop it.

Demp. It has to be done, and it will be done. We're only wasting time. I'll be going——

Mur. 'Tis cruel of ye. I hope he'll come in like a lion and skelp ye. Ye deserve it. Look, I'm fagged out meself—and I doing nothing all day, only visiting the outposts, while Davna—— Oh, you must give him a night's rest—one night at least——

Demp. (*shaking his head*). Has to be done.

Clar. Absolutely necessary — for the movement, of course.

Mur. Shut up—you!

Demp. Tim! Tim!

Mur. John Dempsey, I don' mind you so much; you have a head on you, but that—that!——

Clar. I'm here as representative of the Workmen's Federation, and I must say——

Mur. Right—right! You're right. I apologise. [*He flings himself into a chair.*]

Demp. (*to Clarke*). Are you coming?

Clar. We'll have time for a look round before the meeting.

[*A strident, bullying voice is heard downstairs. Tim Murphy first sits up, then jumps to his feet.*]

Mur. That's him. He's pitching into Danno. Battie'll lose his job. The Lord send it. But listen—hear his voice. For the love of heaven, John, give him a chance:

put this secretary business off for a few days. And Phil was late. I knew he would. Put it off?

Demp. (firmly). No—no!

DAVNA enters like a whirlwind. He is wrought up and excited. He gesticulates brightly and freely.

Dav. What's up? Squabbling! You're squabbling? Oh, I am tired. That crew downstairs, falling about the place. I thought I could keep an eye on that one-armed drummer of ours, but he's too old. How tired I am. O Clarke, I didn't see you. Are you here long?

[He shakes Clarke's hand vigorously.]

Clar. Not long; I said I'd wait. My committee asked me to bring them the news.

Dav. News! Tell them I told the railway men they weren't railway men at all, but railway sleepers. Straight! I told them that. Now——

[As if the question of the railway men was done with.]

Mur. And right! You'd think they were men of property, like the engineers, all the conferences and guarantees they want.

Demp. (to Davna). Yes, likely you did tell them that; but, of course, not till you had got their promise to come out. When do they make a start?

Dav. No, sir. Quite a long time before I even asked them to come out I told them that. The sight of a long time—— Handling tainted goods—what else are they but sleepers? Where are their eyes? they don't see the taint, I suppose.

Demp. But you got their promise?

Dav. No. Not yet. That's why I said it was the sight of a long time.

Demp. But Phil said they were well disposed.

Clar. And we had further evidence to the same effect—unexpected and welcome.

Dav. Had you, now? Did I say they were not well disposed?

Demp. But how are they now?

Dav. How are they now? They're up against reality—up against reality! If they don't see the taint now they're colour-blind. Oh, but I am tired.

Demp. We'd like a little explanation.

Dav. Do you think the railway men are going to come out because we couldn't stick the fight without them? M'word, no! They

come out because Fate beckons them. "Your turn next," he says to them. Let them hear him!

[He turns his back on them, vigorously pulling a lot of books and papers about.]

Demp. But they are coming out?

Dav. Of course they are—when Fate whips them out.

Demp. But the day?

Dav. How do I know? I see Fate moving in their direction. But I can't tell the exact moment he'll touch their shrinking shoulders with his steely finger, can I?

Demp. 'Tis rather late for this sort of riddling. We'd rather——

Dav. I told them what they were—sleepers. In the country they speak of seven classes of birds that hibernate——
Tim, *hibernate*——

Mur. Hibernate! 'tis a lovely mouthful, Captain.

Dav. The people call them the Seven Sleepers. And there were also the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus—ever hear of them, Tim?

Mur. Me memory is failing me, Captain.

Dav. But you, railway men, I said, could

give them all points in the art of drowsing, both birds and Ephesians!

Demp. If they refuse to come out at all?

Dav. That's just it. Do you see they might have come out and never known at all that compared with them the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus were forty winkers! But now they know it, whether they'll come out or not. And they'll never forget it——

[He flings himself into a chair.]

Demp. You're working it off on us. You're not in pleasant humour.

Dav. I'm not. Chawing wood—tarry wood, too—is not pleasant of an evening. Clarke, tell your Workmen's Federation that Fate has not yet touched the railway men on the shoulder—no, but that David Lombard has bared the spot for his imperative finger——

Mur. Imperative finger!

[He clasps his hands with a sense of delight.]

Clar. (pompously). Very well. I'll deliver the message as I got it.

Demp. Take your time, Clarke. Davna, we, too, have been taking stock of reality.

Dav. Good! Good! That's what I've always asked of you.

Demp. And we see it is essential that you have, in future, a secretary—a private secretary.

Dav. (sitting up). Ah, do you? Do you know I'm fagged out?

Demp. The step we propose to take will relieve you of a lot of routine, and you'll have more time to address meetings——

Dav. Hear that, Tim? Isn't he a sly dog? He knows my little weakness.

Demp. It's necessary. We hoped for good news to-night, and you bring us the worst news yet. Well, we have determined on a little reorganisation.

Dav. Reorganisation! There's a mouthful!

Demp. We found these books—I won't say anything about it.

Dav. They're only account books. Books I take no account of are always called account books. The books I take account of—the Bible, for instance—I can never get ye fellows even to look at it. But as for these books—I don't cast a thought on them.

Demp. Well, your secretary will. He'll be paid to do so.

Dav. (rising up angrily). Must I stand

all this? There I was, one against fifty—fifty of them, all wood and steel—and I hammering them. I was like the man in the play who flings himself at the iron door of his cell. It felt the very same. And here were you all the time, judging me. Between the devil and the deep sea, and I not knowing it. Between the hammer and the anvil, and I thinking myself the hammer! A secretary!—a stay!—a brake! Ease her all; she's bucking! Brakes on, Davna, she's plunging! And you were the judges; oh, ye have the brazen faces of people who dare to judge their fellow-humans!

Demp. You don't think I take any pleasure in doing this? You don't seem to recognise the terrible effect this failure of yours to-night will have on our fellows. We must have some card to play against that — something unexpected and striking.

Dav. (weariedly). Come, Tim — come away into the woods. We'll walk and walk. We'll bathe our feet in a rushing stream—I mean a purling brook.

[*He passes his hand over his face weariedly. Tim, not knowing what*

to say, makes faint indecisive gestures with his hands; his look is tragi-comic.

Dav. (continuing). I must have a rest——

[He arranges two chairs and spreads himself upon them.]

Dav. There! *[A pause.]*

Demp. You haven't forgotten that we have a committee meeting at eleven in the Federation Rooms?

Dav. (drowsily, without looking). What for have we this meeting in the Federation Rooms at eleven?

Demp. There's the question of a programme.

Dav. (as before). We have a programme. Haven't I told you everything?

Demp. The refusal of the railway men to come out changes it.

Dav. It doesn't. The railway men will come out as soon as they recognise that Fate speaks through me; that when I touch them on the shoulder, 'tis the finger of Fate!

Demp. We're to meet, anyway.

Dav. Well, meet! But I'm too fagged to stir out of this. There's plenty of you to meet without me—there's Phil.

Demp. If Phil consents to act as your secretary, you'll be satisfied?

[*Davna springs up.*]

Dav. What? But he won't. Of course he won't. You mustn't ask him. . . . You have asked him—I see you have. But he didn't consent. Of course he didn't; 'twould be madness. 'Twould be Limerick all over again.

Demp. We intend to make the proposition to him at the meeting.

Mur. Wouldn't Phil be better for you than anyone else? I think I wouldn't mind Phil.

Dav. What!—Have you all forgotten what happened in Limerick? They gave me Naylor—a fellow I liked, a chum of mine. I kept nothing secret from him. Besides the superficial, artificial life one leads on platforms, playing the hero, lecturing, lecturing——Heavens, how I hate it at times—there was Naylor. I could fall back on him as an old Roman emperor—I forget his name—used to fall back on his cabbage garden. We would speak about the queerest things, have the most outlandish discussions. 'Twas all music to me: it unwound the serpent care had bound about my heart—

I forget the lines. Then I saw him going wrong. I saw him begin to gamble—you never knew backing horses was at the root of all the trouble in Limerick? I tried to keep him straight. But, of course, by right I should have pitched him to the devil. I couldn't. 'Tis easy enough to lecture a crowd, but to lecture an individual soul like your own—I couldn't do it—a man, besides, I had opened my heart to—
Have ye the imaginations of hens?

Demp. But Phil is straight—

Dav. But he's a man! And I'm sure of no man but myself (*he bangs the table*)! And I'm sure of myself only while I'm caged within the four straight walls of our Cause! Outside that cage, why, I could—God, what couldn't I do!

Demp. But these books? We must get some one—

Dav. (*resuming his position on chairs*). A small boy will post them up. You mix little things and big things all together.

Clar. It seems you have an objection to Phil?

Dav. I never asked Phil to do a thing for me that he didn't do it; but I always asked him as a friend. Make him my secretary,

and the very tone of my voice will change when I speak to him; and we'll be watching one another under our eyebrows. How could I bear it! Phil, a fine, fresh, ruddy-hearted boy of a man with all life before him, a man 'tis a pleasure to look upon: in common with all of us his ancestry goes back to Adam, yet how fresh and comely he is; and you wind up, saying: There's hope for the human race after all!

[He shuts his eyes. Pause.]

Demp. But you must accept some one.

Clar. That's settled.

Mur. Well, Phil is off.

Dav. *(rising up slowly).* Leave me alone. I can't stand any more of this. Give me anyone. But I bar Phil Kennedy——

Demp. Well, that will do. Good-night.

[They prepare to leave the room.]

Dav. Wait, *(he ransacks his pockets, pulling out envelopes, trade society tickets, pencils, notebooks, and a heap of coins. He plants them all in a heap on the table, some of the coins and tickets falling to the ground)* there! That will be his first job. They should correspond, tickets and coins. The names are in the books. If there's a penny short, 'tis how I gave it to some poor blind

man—I shouldn't have done it. I apologise to your secretary. Tell him I'll never do it again. [*He settles himself on the chairs.*]

Clar. Well, good-night.

Dav. Good-night. Tim, you're not going?

[*Clarke and Dempsey go out.*]

Mur. No, Captain. [*A pause.*]

Dav. Tim, do you think I'll ever be married?

Mur. (*suddenly put at his ease*). I never knew a person to be asking that question that didn't find himself married before he knew it—— Never!

Dav. (*not heeding*). Because when you are properly flattened out it must be nice to have a home to go to, a home of simple people who will see the world in which you work exactly as you wish them to see it. But digs are the last of all! They're cold and damp and unresponsive.

Mur. They're not the last of all.

Dav. (*as before*). They are.

Mur. No. Delirium tremens is the last of all.

Dav. (*taking some interest*). What do you mean?

Mur. Because when you get delirium tremens you have no future; you're afraid.

Dav. (looking at him). I'm only a fool compared to you.

Mur. Ah, but you're young yet. Did you know a man named Jim Kiely?

Dav. No.

Mur. Well, Jim got the rats very bad one time. When he was quite well again, as good as ever, just for company sake he went into a pub on Merchants' quay with three cattlemen. They were no sooner settled in the snug—Jim had only taken one slug out of his glass—than three big rats rushed out of a hole, bebbled across the floor right under their feet, and down another hole was in the corner, quick as lightning. Well, the cattlemen didn't let one word out of them, because, God help us, they knew the disease Jim was after recovering from. But he looked from one to another of them—and he was a terrible cross man—and at last he said: "Maybe now ye'll be telling me three rats ran across that floor?" Do you see, he was groping. He wasn't sure whether the rats were in his brain or on the floor. They said nothing. He pitched on one of them. "Was there three rats ran across that floor?" he said. And the poor man, like the fool he was,

shook his head and said there were no rats there at all. Well, poor Kiely rose up with the sweat dropping off of him, and "Lord! Lord! I'm getting them again!" he said. And he went home in a terrible state of mind, and only one slug gone out of the glass!

Dav. (quietly). Thank you, Festus, thank you! Go on. Maybe you have another one?

Mur. There was another man, a poor schoolmaster——

[Dempsey pushes in the door and stands at it.]

Dav. Go on, Festus.

Demp. I'm not interrupting you? We're after getting news that a hundred blacklegs are to arrive to-morrow by the Liverpool boat.

[There is no reply or comment for a moment.]

Dav. Go on, Tim. The new secretary will attend to the blacklegs.

[Dempsey looks at them, then turns out and slams the door after him.]

Mur. What'll you do now?

Dav. We'll go to our digs. Come along. Sure Danno told me that 'twas the news of the blacklegs was after sending him on the

beer again. And 'tis only now they hear of it! Is that gas all right?

Mur. We'll turn it off at the meter.

[They go.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

TIME—*The afternoon of the next day.*

SCENE—*The same as in Act I.*

The curtain rising, discovers DEMPSEY and CLARKE seated at the table, busy writing.

Demp. That covers the lot, I think. Do you know of any others?

Clar. The rest of them would be useless for our purpose. Anyway, three of them can do the business as well as a dozen. 'Tis an unfortunate business for us.

Demp. 'Tis Davna's fault. His recklessness is getting hold of the men. Only for O'Sullivan's timely action who knows what would have happened!—*(there is a tapping at door of room)*. Come in.

Bat. 'Tis only me. 'Tis how there's a

gang of them outside on the lobby wanting to see ye about Tobin's arrest, and I'm tired of telling them ye're busy; but 'tis all no use. See ye they will.

Demp. (to Clarke). Are we better see them?

Clar. 'Tis very awkward for us. (To Battie), Perhaps you'd go out and tell them that we're up to our eyes in business connected with the same unfortunate occurrence.

Demp. Ask them if they could come back in an hour's time.

Bat. No use. Not a bit of use. They're mighty saucy and independent-like. Of course, 'tis how a few of the ringleaders are egging the other fellows on.

Clar. You might try, anyhow. Just reason with them.

Demp. We'll leave it to yourself. Say we're extremely busy and all that—you see we are.

Bat. Well, I'll take it on. I'll reason with them. When I was in Father Murphy's Confraternity usedn't he say there wasn't a man in Cork could make an impression on me—and 'twas true for him, I was that hardened——

Clar. Yes, yes.

Bat. (impudently). Yes—is it? 'Tis a fact—that's all about it. [*He glares at Clarke.*

Demp. They'll be getting impatient.

Bat. Ye may as well make up yer minds to face the music——

Clar. (haughtily). I beg your pardon?

Bat. Oh, it's all right. [*He slouches out.*

Clar. What an impudent creature!

Demp. Oh, he's one of Davna's pets. He hopes to reform him. He will!

Clar. Why has he that class always hanging around him? There's that man, Murphy, I simply can't bear him. Here he comes again.

Enter BATTIE.

Bat. They wouldn't listen to me. I knew they wouldn't. They're coming up.

[*Rapping again at door. Battie goes to it. Some workmen come in, fierce-looking, all their minds set on the one point.*

Bat. (roughly). Ye mustn't stay long. These gentlemen are busy. Sit down let ye.

[*One or two seat themselves. Battie goes out.*

Clar. Take a seat, please.

[*Another workman sits down, as if under protest.*

Demp. You'll be more comfortable sitting, so will we.

[*One or two others seat themselves.*

Dempsey rises, as if to get chairs.

1st W. I'm all right. I'll do as I am. (*Dempsey resumes seat.*) Mr Dempsey, we needn't tell you what's after bringing us up. 'Tis you'll be telling us. 'Tis for information we came up at all.

[*He looks at the others ; they nod at him.*

Demp. We'll do our best.

2nd W. That's all we want; we're just looking for information.

[*The rest murmur approval.*

1st W. 'Tis the business about Tobin we don't understand—Tobin and our new secretary—O'Sullivan. We always thought we could depend on our own——

Clar. What is it you don't understand?

1st W. (firing up). We don't understand how 'tis right or natural for any secretary of ours to get a member of the Union arrested at a moment's notice——

3rd W. One of the best members in the Union, too——

2nd W. You wouldn't mind, at least I wouldn't, if he was after doing anything out of the way——

3rd W. Nor I; but he wasn't.

Demp. Were you there when it happened?

3rd W. I wasn't. I was at me post on the South jetties, where I had to be——

1st W. I was there. The like of it was never witnessed. We were dumbfounded, and no wonder: Davna telling the railway men last night they hadn't the spirit to strike a blow, and this new-fangled secretary of ours getting Tobin arrested before he had ever the time to strike a blow—— That's what we can't understand.

Demp. (to 2nd Workman). And did you see it?

2nd W. Of course I did. Michael here is speaking for me. We were together by Dineen's corner; we saw it all. "That's the man, constable," he said; "arrest him." Why, the sight left us; and 'twas all done in a jiffey!

Demp. But isn't there anything to be said on O'Sullivan's side? Our secretary, for a new man, took rather extreme action; but then it was a very critical moment. Still, I don't say that I'd have done the same myself. But anyhow, he prevented riot and bloodshed—isn't that so?

1st W. He did, at our expense.

2nd W. He left in the blacklegs without let or hindrance.

3rd W. What are we organised for? Blazes, 'tis a queer thing——

1st W. And Davna after telling us to stand together like a wall and let no man break through. . . . As for blacklegs, he said . . . [*He stops suddenly.*]

Clar. Well, what did he advise in the case of blacklegs—that's interesting——

1st W. Oh, nothing. But there's no fear one of them blacklegs would ever get ashore to-day only for this assistant secretary of ours——

Clar. But you said Davna told you—what did he tell you?

2nd W. What he said was for us to——

1st W. (*interrupting*). What he said had nothing to do with it. We all knew that the blacklegs—strike-breakers what's worse—were coming in by the Liverpool boat; and so 'twas only natural for us to gather to see the scabs; and what Davna said hadn't a ha'p'orth in ~~the~~ world to do with it.

3rd W. And now there's Pat Tobin up in the body of the jail, and the strike-breakers

ensconced at their ease in the Ship Hotel with lashings and leavings spread on the table before them—— 'Tis a nice state of things——

2nd W. That's the talk. And Tobin a man that never reneged.

Demp. But only for O'Sullivan's action there'd have been a riot—you admit that?

3rd W. We don't!

1st W. We won't admit anything—what fools we'd be. What are we but poor ignorant men—men of the quays.

2nd W. But where's O'Sullivan? That's the lad we'd like to have a fair and straight talk with. Why isn't he here?

1st W. We're not welcome—that's how 'tis——

Demp. We didn't know you were coming. As for O'Sullivan, he's at his post, as this good man here says—he's where we sent him doing the business of the society.

Clar. And I dare say doing it well——

1st W. (*scornfully*). Oh, 'tis likely—'tis likely!

2nd W. After the start he made this morning he'd want to do it damn well——

3rd W. We didn't come here for a ha'p'orth of lookabout. We were sent here.

Go out, Tom and call up the others—maybe then they'll believe us——

Demp. There's no occasion. One will do as well as a dozen.

2nd W. Maybe that means I'm not wanted.

1st W. Nor I——

Demp. Let us talk reasonably about the matter.

3rd W. But we haven't got any explanation; what are we to tell our fellows when we go out——

2nd W. How do we know what this O'Sullivan will be doing next? What does Davna say about it: that's another thing we'd like to know?

1st W. And what about Tobin? Is he going to be deserted?

Demp. You're giving us no chance. We haven't seen Davna at all to-day. As for Tobin, we're sorry for him. But that's the very business we're on. That's the very business you're after interrupting. Look (*he takes up sealed letters*) there!—we're giving the magistrates the straight tip—they'll understand.

1st W. But when will he be released?

Demp. Well, the fact is the man who

was pushed into the river lies in a dangerous condition: the wound in his head is worse than was thought.

2nd W. But Tobin didn't push him in——

3rd W. Far away from him he was.

Demp. We don't know who pushed him in. Anyway, the police have a grip on Tobin, and you know very well——

3rd W. Oh, but that's not good enough——

2nd W. The man shouldn't be in jail at all.

1st W. And he wouldn't only for O'Sullivan. Law and order he wants—— Is it law and order we do be thinking about, I wonder, and we walking up and down the quays in the wind and it northerly, cold and hungry——

Clar. We all recognise that; and how loyal you have been. But violence won't win the strike.

3rd W. Sugar-sticks won't win it.

1st W. Come on away down; we're as wise as when we came up. Davna will listen to us, if other people won't——

2nd W. But won't ye sack O'Sullivan?

Demp. Oh, no. It took quite a lot of trouble to appoint him.

1st W. Come on down, I tell ye, they're fooling us——

2nd W. If ye'd promise to sack him, well we'd have some story to carry with us——

Demp. (*rising up*). Take my word for it, men, we didn't appoint an assistant secretary until we had to. If I showed you these books there, you'd be surprised to see how backward the accounts are.

Clar. Trust us a little longer. You do not know the difficulties we have to contend with. Your lot is hard: we know that. I may say you are the hard-working, patient, long-suffering infantry: you bear the brunt of the battle; but we, too, have our responsibilities, and they are no light responsibilities.

3rd W. (*impressed*). Oh, no doubt you have. We're not crying out again' you. The men in office must be respected, or the wheels wouldn't go round—we know that; but all the same——

2nd W. When will Davna be here? He understands us.

Demp. We don't know. He is over-worked: that was one of the reasons why we appointed O'Sullivan.

1st W. Come on away, we're as wise as when we came in.

Demp. Let me say one word. There's nothing would please our enemies so much as to see disunity creeping in amongst us. You know that. On the other hand, nothing will alarm them so much as to see us behaving like a disciplined army. Does an army kick up a row if one of its men is put in the lock-up for some breach of discipline? That is how we must look on this Tobin business. He is in jail for a breach of discipline: it is all the better that we, through our new secretary, should have taken a hand in putting him there. Look at it in that light, and our enemy will soon capitulate. They can fight a mob, but not an army. If we allow ourselves to be stampeded into violence——

1st W. 'Tis cold comfort we're getting from you. Come on out.

2nd W. The longer we stay the colder they're getting.

3rd W. Good-bye, anyway.

[*They go out muttering.*]

Demp. They're not satisfied.

Clar. Give them time to digest it. They had nothing to reply to you.

Demp. They're brooding on Tobin. I hope they're not all like this sample.

Clar. Not at all. That's Tobin's gang. Only the hot-heads would come up here on such a foolish errand. I'm glad that man Murphy wasn't here: he'd have sympathised with them.

Demp. How everything that happens seems to help the employers. And all because we're not disciplined.

Clar. And not educated. Organisation and Education—if we could write these words in flaming letters——

Demp. (*looks at him*). Yes. I often wonder if the bosses recognise our difficulty in keeping our men from violence.

Clar. They don't, nor the priests either.

Demp. Well, the railway men will consider themselves very fortunate in having resisted Davna's gentle persuasions last night.

Enter TIM MURPHY.

Mur. (*brightly*). Well, boys, this is a nice little kick-up. Seething discontent. Open rebellion. It must be hard on you two, guardians of law and order—eh?

Demp. You give us a high title; but

you're joking, you know. There you are!
(*He passes some envelopes to Clarke.*) Count them.

Clar. Is that the lot?

Demp. Yes.

Mur. You're a great pair of workers, God bless you.

Clar. Are you after seeing Davna? Is he coming up?

Mur. No, then, I'm not after seeing him. I don't know whether he'll be here or not. Since we have an assistant secretary now, there's no reason why he should come here so often. Everything will go smoothly now. 'Twas that same assistant secretary I hoped to find here before me.

Demp. What do you want him for?

Mur. To see his side of this Tobin affair. I can hardly believe the men's side—'tis too stupid for anything: our own arresting us!

Demp. Tobin was always a hot-head, you know that; and hot-heads are dangerous just now. I think O'Sullivan did quite right in having him arrested. We're prepared to stand by his action.

Mur. Ye are?

Demp. We gain nothing by giving way to violence.

Clar. Why, the whole city would be up against us. I daresay the papers will come out very strong against us to-morrow.

Mur. The city! The city! It has been such a good mother to us!

Enter O'SULLIVAN. He is prim, and dry in manner.

But here he is: the saviour of this ancient city. Congratulations, Assistant Secretary!

O'Sull. (rather taken off his guard). Thank you, thank you. You really think——

[*He makes quickly towards Murphy with outstretched hand.*

Mur. (roughly and raising his fist). Get out, you scab!

Clar. Well, we congratulate you. You have played a man's part. You were the right man in the right place; we were very fortunate——

O'Sull. Thank you, Mr Clarke. But I don't understand. I have put in a hard day. I have suffered considerable annoyance since this morning's unfortunate occurrence, but at least I expected my action to be supported here. I want a united committee behind me. If I haven't——

Demp. You will, practically. We are

satisfied with what you have done. You have prepared a report?

O'Sull. I have; but I wonder should I first show it to Mr. Lombard?

Mur. You ought to: he would enjoy it.

Demp. Is it long?

Clar. If you just read the important part—the portion dealing with the unfortunate affair on Patrick's quay this morning.

O'Sull. That part is not long. I confined myself to the facts.

Mur. As the peelers do.

O'Sull. I don't catch your meaning, Mr. Murphy?

Mur. Tim Murphy does all right. Only my enemies call me Mr.

O'Sull. (*reading*). In accordance with instructions——

Mur. Ah!

O'Sull. (*reading*). I proceeded——

Mur. He proceeded!

O'Sull. I ask your protection.

Clar. Read right on: we're used to him.

O'Sull. (*reading*) . . . to St. Patrick's quay to witness the arrival of the blacklegs from Liverpool, it being my intention to interview them, if possible, and persuade them to

return to their own country. My programme did not work out quite as I intended.

Mur. They never do.

O'Sull. (reading). A large number of our men had assembled, and I observed at once that the gathering was not the spontaneous result of natural curiosity, as evidently it had been previously organised and was under the leadership of one man, viz., Pat Tobin.

Demp. We have received a certain—hint—that it was organised. However, you understand that no word of this is to get into the Press.

O'Sull. Quite. But I thought it best to set out the full facts here in this——

Demp. Right! Read on.

O'Sull. (reading). Knowing that all ideas of violence were repugnant to the committee I need not say that I found myself in a tight corner. No sooner did the strike-breakers begin to disembark than there was a wild rush towards them. A scene of great confusion followed. Sticks were freely used and stones were flung. One of the strike-breakers was either thrown or edged into the river——

Mur. Poor chap!—his mother won't know him.

O'Sull. (reading). To save the situation I directed the constabulary to place the man Tobin under arrest. Having done so, the effect I looked for followed. The interest of the crowd was directed into a new channel——

Mur. And the blacklegs came ashore at their ease! You'll never recover from it.

O'Sull. What else was to be done?

Mur. Davna will tell you that.

Clar. You did your duty fearlessly and nobly.

Mur. O Lord!

O'Sull. (reading). When the excitement——

Demp. That's enough. We must only sit firm when Davna comes in. He'll be blowing at a great rate. Look here, Tim, you'll be against us in this, but you ought to consider whether rounding on O'Sullivan here will help Davna in the long run. A leader is one who keeps his followers in check, and not one who incites them to violence. A mob orator can do that. Only for Davna's violent speech last night to them, likely the railway men would be with

us to-day, and the whole strike would take a new direction. As it is they may never come out. The finger of Fate may not touch them.

Mur. Leave off, leave off, if you please.

Demp. But seriously, I ask you to help us in this. Get Davna to act firm with us. We have an opportunity now of proving to the city, our city, that our Union makes for law and not for——

Mur. The city! The city! Our city! What part of it is ours? The filth of it. The backyards and the slums.

Clar. But it would not be well to have it against us.

Mur. 'Tis always against us. Does it turn its back on the unjust employer, on the sweater, or the scab? What sort of houses have we to live in? Kennels! Where do our children play? In the filthy alleys. Where do they sleep? In filthy tenements. You know it. The city!

Clar. The voice is the voice of cranky old Tim Murphy, but the thoughts are the thoughts of Davna, the Labour Leader!

Mur. You've struck it, matey; and I'm not ashamed to speak them—so there.

[A short pause.]

O'Sull. I thought Phil Kennedy might be here.

Mur. (suddenly looking at him, as if he caught something ominous in the words). He's sulking, my dear man. And no wonder. These people rounded on him.

Clar. What's that?

Demp. What'll you say next?

Mur. You offered him the secretaryship.

Clar. He wouldn't accept it.

Mur. You said he would; you said he needed only a little pressure. But no, instead of sticking to your first choice you passed the job on to this poor creature of a man—and he's after putting his foot in it the first thing. No wonder Phil would sulk.

Demp. (to O'Sullivan). Don't answer him. Phil is all right. Go down and tell Battie to send for him.

O'Sull. Perhaps I had better see him myself? Perhaps I could better explain to him?

Mur. Ah!

Demp. Very well. Tell him the whole affair. And bring him along to help us against Davna.

O'Sull. I think Phil Kennedy is the key to the situation.

Mur. Do you now? That's interesting.

O'Sull. Well, then, I have the committee's permission to confer with Phil?

Clar. Yes, certainly.

Demp. Yes, you'd better see him.

Mur. Go and implore him to get you out of the mess you're in! *ye get*

O'Sull. These things don't affect me. *can*

[O'Sullivan goes out.]

Mur. There ye are! Ye weren't satisfied with Davna's way of writing the minutes: begor, 't isn't the minutes is troubling ye now, I'm thinking. If that O'Sullivan gets a rap of a nice little stick on the head . . . he may thank himself——

Clar. He's able to take care of himself. He has proved his mettle already.

Demp. Oh, we won't be always living at high pressure.

[A scuffle is heard taking place outside room door.]

Clar. Here's more of it. Are these men coming back?

[A wild-looking woman, Mrs Tobin, bursts excitedly into the room; her hair and shawl are flying. Battie follows, trying to get her out.]

Mrs T. Give me me boy!

Bat. Ma'am, ma'am, you're forgetting yourself—you're forgetting yourself.

Clar. Oh, nonsense; what sort of a caretaker have we?

Mrs T. Give me me boy, or by the Cross——

Bat. Come on, ma'am, you'll have to——

Demp. Leave her alone, Bat——

Mrs T. Don't be tearing me, I'm telling ye.

Mur. Take your hands off the woman.

Mrs T. Give me me boy.

Bat. Oh, very well—if I'm not to touch her. *[He goes apart.]*

Demp. Sit down, ma'am, we're here to assist you.

Mrs T. Ye are!—sitting here at yer ease and the poor simple gomerall up in Cork jail—sitting at yer ease——

Clar. 'Twould be worse if he had the stain of crime on him.

Mrs T. Is that the kind ye are? A son of mine! I tell ye 'twas far different the rearing I gave him and the rearing ye got; wherever ye got it, I don't care. Oh, he's only one of the men, one of the men, the gang, the toughs, pulling and hauling till their bones do be creaking, working the winches, working in cold and wet, in dirt

and filth, swallowing the slack of the coal till their spit is the colour of it.

Demp. Sit down, ma'am. We're sorry for you and your boy. We'll do all we can to help you.

Mrs T. In the cold and wet and all for nothing, putting themselves in the power of the law, and ye sitting here with yer bellies lined and warm with the good drink and the good food. Give me me boy or I'll pull the place about yer heads.

Clar. If you'd listen to reason.

[*Dempsey stands up.*]

Mrs T. Where are ye going? Ye won't stir out of this.

Demp. I'm not going to.

Mrs T. Maybe 'tis arrested we'll be. Ah (*to Dempsey*), you're O'Sullivan—O'Sullivan! That's the name I got. Honour of God! Our own denouncing us! "Arrest him, constable; drag him off to jail, constable." If his father was alive he'd come and smash ye up with one blow.

Demp. I'm not O'Sullivan. My name is Dempsey.

Mrs T. (*as if she had heard that name before*). Maybe I'm wronging ye. (*She turns to Clarke.*) Is it you?

Clar. No, ma'am, my name is Clarke—I'm sure you've heard——

Demp. Sit down, Mrs Tobin, have a little patience——

Mrs T. When I was the size of that (*she holds out her hand a child's height*) 'twas the same story—patience! patience! patience! And what have I for it? A poor beast of burden I am, dragging and hauling——

Demp. We're writing to the magistrates. You'll have your boy back in a day or two.

Mrs T. But where's O'Sullivan?

Mur. He went out as you came in; you passed him, likely.

Mrs T. That ghost of a man went under me arm—was that the hell-hound?

Demp. You'd be more respectful if you knew his reason.

Mrs T. (to Battie). You knew I was looking for him, and you wouldn't tell me—oh, no, send the fool farther. Who am I? The mother of the poor boy that's up in Cork jail! After all the years and the slaving—that's what I am—a crazy woman going from place to place.

[*She covers her face and sits sobbing.*]

Clar. There's no disgrace on you: the boy didn't rob or steal.

Mur. The only man among them, that's what I call him.

Mrs T. The blacklegs!—the filth and scourings of Liverpool, coming over here, snatching the bit out of our mouths. What do they deserve but a bating. 'Tis a new come-out that we must denounce our own for doing the like, so 'tis.

Mur. Mrs Tobin, I'm Tim Murphy ; maybe you heard your boy speak of me?

Mrs T. I did then, and often. I'm glad to know ye, sir. And highly he spoke of ye. . . . And can you help me at all? I have no one to turn to——

[She rises and grips his hand, clinging to it.]

Mur. Well, ma'am, I'll speak to Davna about him—he won't be forgotten.

Mrs T. Will you, sir? His name is Pat Tobin. He takes a drop, but beyond that, he's the best boy a mother ever reared.

Mur. I know him, and I respect him.

Mrs T. Do you, sir? You're comforting me. 'Tis a small thing, a couple of words is, but when we're in trouble——

Mur. Believe me, Davna won't forget a man is after going to jail for the cause. Davna was in jail himself.

Mrs T. That's true, that's true. 'Tis—maybe I'm doing wrong, complaining and hullagoning. But we're not used to it. The Tobins were never robbers nor hagglers nor night strollers.

Mur. He's suffering for us all. His heart is lighting up with pride, ma'am. He's not fretting nor complaining at all. I'm an old man, but I'd swap places with him this minute, I would that.

Mrs T. Forgive me, sir. All of ye. I see I'm doing the mean thing in begrudging him. But our own shouldn't be denouncing us to the police, should they, sir?

Mur. We'll have to have some inquiry into that, ma'am. Maybe you'd take my advice now and go home, and we'll call to you or send to you——

Mrs T. I will, sir, and God bless ye. Forgive me. Poor people like me, poor ignorant people like me, how do we know what's wrong from what's right, when we're upset? But only to be doing the thing comes to us—wild and foolish. We have no one to guide us—none that we would go near. Only to be toiling and moiling from morning till night, and in the end of all only to have one trouble overtaking another.

If 't isn't sickness 'tis idleness, and if 't isn't idleness 'tis debt. Praise be to God, how did I come through it at all, and rear him up the fine man he is! I'll go home, and I'll tell the neighbours how 'tis proud I am of having him where he is, proud and not fretting at all!

Mur. That's it, that's it. Proud and not fretting at all!

Mrs T. And whatever trouble comes to me from the Giver of all, can't I take it as well as another? Forgive me, gentlemen; what I done, 'twas in ignorance.

Mur. You have done nothing to be ashamed of.

Mrs T. Good-day to ye. And where am I to go to now? [*She makes for door.*]

Mur. (*starting up*). Wait! Stand where you are. (*He gets silence with a gesture.*)

'Tis his voice I heard—listen——

Demp. (*to Clarke*). Is it O'Sullivan?

Mur. 'Tis a better man.

Clar. 'Tis Phil; I'm glad.

[*He stands up.*]

Mur. 'Tis not. 'Tis a better man. 'Tis Davna, Mrs Tobin; the man will see you righted.

Mrs T. Leave me out, sir, leave me out.

Mur. No, ma'am; he'll be glad to meet you.

Mrs T. And I this way, like a wild woman! Don't breathe a whisper of it, sir; only let me slip out unbeknownst.

Mur. No, ma'am; you'll listen to him, ma'am, and you'll go home with a fire in your heart. Welcome——

Mrs T. Oh, sir—oh; sir——

Enter DAVNA with fight in his eyes.

Mur. You're well?

Dav. Well! I'm after a sleep of fourteen hours. I'm like a young colt. Who's this?

Mur. The mother of the man who is in jail for us.

Dav. Ah! One of our Spartan mothers. I'll take your hand, Mrs Tobin (*she wipes her hand in her apron*). 'Tis clean, 'tis cleaner than my own. No fear of us while we have mothers like you. I'm glad to know you.

[*They shake hands.*]

Mrs T. He's the only boy I have left, but take him, take him. I don't begrudge him at all.

Dav. My Spartan mother, we accept him. Tell his father to raise up his head: his name will be honoured in the land.

Mrs T. His father is dead fifteen years, sir.

Dav. Then he honours his relics in the grave. And he honours your rearing.

Mrs T. Oh, sir.

Dav. Where is your house?

Mrs T. Don't mind it, sir.

Dav. I want to know it. If I am tired or broken or dispirited I'll turn in there and beg a cup of tea from you—and come out refreshed. Give me the address, Mrs Tobin.

Mur. She's proud, she says, and not fretting at all.

Dav. Of course she's proud. Your address, ma'am. [*He takes out his pocket book.*]

Mrs T. You'll be welcome kindly. 'Tis in Gillabbey Street.

Dav. And the number?

[*He writes in his book.*]

Mrs T. 174, sir, on the first floor.

Dav. (*shutting book*). I'll not forget it.

Mrs T. I'll be going now. Good-bye, sir, and God bless you for the courage you're after giving me—and this man, too (*to Murphy*).

Dav. Good-bye, Mrs Tobin. Show her down, Tim, like a good boy. Take care of her. [*Murphy and Mrs Tobin go out.*]

Dav. 174, Gillabbey Street—first floor—
there's a refuge 'gainst the day of evil!

*[A pause—they listen to the steps
descending.]*

Dav. Well, Clarke—well? What had you
to say to her, that woman of the people?

Clar. You didn't see her when she came
first.

Dav. Ah!—And you consoled her?

Clar. Well, we did our best for her.

Dav. And did that skunk, O'Sullivan, see
her?

Demp. Now, now!

Dav. What else is he! Frozen water—
that's what he is. When a man has the
fever, you put a lump of ice on his head,
don't you? Where is he, that lump of ice
you'd put on this fevered brow of mine?
Why wasn't he here to confront that poor
homely patch gone out the door, that poor
clot of flesh and blood? I would have stood
by—"Comfort her with logic, O'Sullivan,"
I'd have said to him. "With statistics!—
she's only a woman of the people, and the
people must come under the great laws:
they are but a herd, natural phenomena,
like the gobble-stones on the beach, products
of tides and wear-and-tear and storms."

"Teach her her part, O'Sullivan," I'd have said; "her big heart puts her beside it!"—And, the muddle-headed cipher, he would attempt it, I think, I really think——

Demp. Haven't we heard something like all this before?

Dav. You have, but you haven't swallowed it. When you make it your own, then Tim Murphy and I, we'll leave you—Mount Melleray for me!

Demp. If you're finished, we'd like to get some business done. We must ask you a few questions.

Dav. Ask them; or wait, I'll ask you. Is he not a muddle-pated nought? Hasn't he ruined everything? I went last night and tried to put a little spirit into these railway sleepers, and this fellow to-day goes and makes a laughing-stock of me and my theories, of me and my men, of all my work of years! Who could stand that? Why don't you answer?

Demp. Better come to business——

Dav. You have no answer—that's why. Which is the more important—now, listen: Here are two straight questions, and we won't go from them, business or no business, till they're answered. (*Dempsey rises up,*

yawning.) Oh, yes, that's the way. Yawn at me. We workers are more up against first principles than any class in the community, but whenever I try to get you back to first principles, you yawn at me. You can't stand them. I suppose you do your best, but don't you see you grub along on a lower level? You must spring to a higher plane——

Demp. (to Clarke). The plane of the fevered brow, he means——

Clar. We know our place, Mr Lombard.

Dav. (to Dempsey). The wisdom of the world is thick in you. You're a religious man: why don't you read the Bible, a revolutionary tract, and work it out——

Demp. It seems to me that your fourteen hours' sleep is working itself out; we have a lot of business——

Dav. We must settle the two questions: Number one: Which is the greater evil: that the peace of this city be broken in twain, or the solidarity of our movement be broken in pieces——

Demp. Why should either be broken?

Dav. You're right. Handled properly, this blackleg business might have strengthened our position; but to preserve the peace of

the city, our finicky little secretary finds it necessary to pull down and break in pieces all the work of my splendid youth——

Demp. Oh!

Dav. Oh away!—You know 'tis true. All that I laboured for—that splendid “strike one strike all” spirit, which I stole from the aristocrats—that spirit was growing up like the eastern flowers they speak about—was growing up everywhere; you could see it in that noble-looking woman of the people we had here just now—and all that your little threepenny bit of a secretary has gone and broken on his knee——

Demp. Lift the window, John; 'tis a pity all this should be wasted on two of us—two unbelievers into the bargain.

Clar. I am amazed——

Dav. Don't anger me! Am I to keep silent while this fellow pulls the prop from my building? What am I supposed to be made of? Sometimes I feel like—(*he pulls himself up*). But the second question is more important: Which morality is the surer guide? That morality you imbibe with your Irish mother's milk, the morality that rules you by way of impulse, or that morality which reckons up the cost and consequence

of acting at all? Here's what I'm getting at: Strike-breakers are unprincipled miscreants: our native morality tells us to down them, as we down vermin. But when Secretary O'Sullivan handed Tobin over to the police, he told us all to distrust that inbred morality——

Demp. O'Sullivan isn't the only logic-chopper, it seems.

Dav. But isn't it correct? Don't you see it? That woman that was here, her great-heartedness overcomes me. Clarke, when you were a little kid of a fellow, did you ever feel your mother's hand resting on your head or against your cheek?

Clar. (*shrugging his shoulders with a queer smile*). Maybe I did——

Dav. How soft and big and warm and comforting it felt . . . and thrilling, too.

Clar. I see, Mr Lombard, you're what the people call a great slob——

Dav. Ain't I? Well, that woman of the people, her great heart cloaks me with comfort, overwhelms me . . . and I'll do what she asks——

Demp. What she asks? — She asks nothing.

Dav. Come what may, I'll do what she

asks. (*The door is rapped.*) Come in, matey, come in.

Enter O'SULLIVAN.

Ah, 'tis you, you!

O'Sull. Good-evening.

Dav. Well?

O'Sull. You're after hearing of our shindy——

Dav. Yes, sir. I wouldn't be surprised if you have written a report on it.

O'Sull. I have. Mr Dempsey told you of it?

Dav. Indeed he didn't.

Demp. He didn't give us time.

Dav. Where's Phil?

O'Sull. He'll be here presently.

Dav. How do you know?

O'Sull. He told me so just now.

Dav. Has he approved the report?

Demp. We'll have the report soon enough.

Dav. Why not let himself answer? But it doesn't matter. I have my mind made up on the whole matter, and clinched. But I confess it was that great-hearted Irish mother did the clinching. (*Calling out*) Battie! Battie! (*To those present*) One moment now, and we'll all settle down and begin our meeting—Carroll sends word he can't be here; nor Taylor either.

Bat. (*sticking in his head*). Captain!

Dav. You were asleep again?

Bat. (*coming in slowly, and solemnly shutting the door*). I declare to the Most High——

Dav. What did I call you for? What was it?

Bat. Coal, maybe?

Dav. No. Oh, I have it. That woman of the people—is she gone away?

Bat. Gone away? We don't have any of that class in here. I wouldn't allow it. The priests would very soon get to know——

[*He gestures with his one arm.*]

Dav. You battered lamp post. Is that honest woman I was talking to here a moment ago gone away?

Bat. Is it Mollie Tobin you mean?

Dav. Oh, you filthy snail—can you bring her back again? We want her.

Bat. I suppose I could. Are you after sending round the hat?

Dav. We are not!

Bat. Well, that's what she'll think.

Dav. She won't think any such thing.

Bat. Won't she? Oh, very well. But I'll prepare her for the worst. [*He goes out.*]

Dav. We'll have her at our meeting.

Demp. What for?

Dav. Just to inspire us. See, O'Sullivan doesn't object.

O'Sull. It seems to me most irregular.

Dav. *Most irregular!* That's very good. He's afraid of flesh and blood. He's not afraid of any amount of decimal points, but flesh and blood is most irregular, and God knows it is.

Enter PHIL KENNEDY.

Dav. Ah, here's our own Phil, just in time. Catch Phil to object!—Phil, these democrats want to shut out flesh and blood; want to shut out democracy!

Phil. (*laughing*). But here I am!

Dav. No, Phil, not a bit like him: you're too clean. But the thing is: Do you object to Mrs Tobin being present at our meeting?

Phil. Who's Mrs Tobin?

Dav. A friend of O'Sullivan's here.

Phil. Oh, I know. What do you want her for?

Demp. To hearten us!

Dav. Quite right. To make us brave and human. That's where we have the power over all the other parties, if only we knew it. We are in touch with flesh and blood; see its eyes; hear it howling in the nights—a hungry wolf—yet some of us think we

must find our—our inspiration in statistics!—in tombstones instead of flesh and blood!

Phil. I thought we were to have a meeting? Is this a meeting? O'Sullivan, you needn't put all this in the minutes——

Dav. He needn't. But we'd better begin. I have to catch the 5.10 to Queenstown. Take the chair, Dempsey.

[He hands Dempsey a chair, who sits in it carelessly.]

Dav. You can have the report when I'm gone. For me it doesn't count—I have written too many of them myself. Well, Phil, I was saying when you came in, we'd have Mrs Tobin at our meeting.

Demp. We won't! Give me that book, Mr Secretary. *(O'Sullivan gives him a book and a pen.)* Mrs Tobin isn't on the agenda.

Dav. Very well. *(He rises and goes to door.)* *(Calling out)* Battie! Battie!

Bat. (far away). Captain.

Dav. Ring off flesh and blood!

Bat. (as before). What are you saying?

Dav. Switch off flesh and blood! Their stomachs couldn't stand it: 'tis too irregular!

Bat. (as before). Dunno what you're saying. Wait, and I'll go up.

Dav. Ah, go to the devil. (*He bangs the door.*) We'll have to do without her.

Demp. Sit down for the love of heaven and let us begin. Everything is upside down, and here you are for the last half hour——

Dav. Phil, flesh and blood was here in all her native pomp and majesty when I came in: she implored us to do a certain thing, and we'll do it——

Clar. I'm sure she did nothing of the sort——

Demp. Don't be play-acting at such a time.

Phil. Well, what was it she implored of us——

Dav. They couldn't read her! It was as plain as sunlight. We'll make an attack on the prison van to-morrow, and give her back her son!

Phil. (*rising up*). What! You're not in earnest?

Dav. We'll rescue Tobin: we'll rescue Labour from the grip of the Law which——

Clar. I may as well withdraw.

[*He stands up with much importance.*]

Dav. . . . which has shackled it in all ages, in all nations!

Demp. Sit down: the meeting is not yet begun.

Phil. Don't you think we have enough on hand——

Demp. Sit down, Phil. We haven't got as far yet as——

Dav. We'll hit that prison car a bang that will echo and re-echo all round the world!

Phil. Let us be serious. This isn't the time for dramatic side shows: we're not a film company——

Dav. Side shows!

Phil. These bursts of violence—where'll they lead to?

Dav. Violence! It is our only weapon. . . . We'll awaken Labour—the sleeping giant, poor one-eyed Polyphemus.

O'Sull. If I may suggest——

Dav. You, suggest! After what you've done!

O'Sull. I?

Demp. The meeting has not begun——

Dav. Yes, I know that. But flesh and blood is quite irregular: it does not wait for the meeting to begin. It is in a hurry to recover its self-respect—and there is no other way——

Clar. Thanks to Mr O'Sullivan, we have exhibited a spirit of self-respect and discipline the like of which——

Dav. Do you really hold by that? You, Dempsey?

Demp. Certainly.

Dav. Can you read the human face? The human face, the human clock—there's a thing that never lies!—if only one can read it. Before I'd heard one word of all this—this that O'Sullivan speaks of as a shindy—I knew something dreadful was after happening, something that had lost us caste. This is what was written on their brows: Weighed in the balance and found wanting! (*To O'Sullivan*) This sop's cowardice——

Clar. Again I protest.

Demp. Sit down, all of you. Let us begin regularly——

Dav. This sop's cowardice has dealt our self-respect a knock-out blow. Only something as swift and fierce will recover it: we must rescue our brother. He typifies Labour . . . we'll free him.

Demp. It is time to get to business. Davna, I ask you to sit down.

Dav. I'm not going to attend your meeting at all—I'm only——

Clar. And what are you here for?

Dav. To tell you—what I'm after telling you——

Demp. Very well—if you allow us, we'll begin without you.

Dav. I'm going, just now. Of course, you'll keep it dark.

Demp. It will be all over Cork in the morning.

Dav. Why should it?

Demp. Why tell us at all?

Phil. Well, you're spreading the news yourself pretty freely—maybe Battie's at the keyhole.

Dav. Listen, now. It is right you should know it—if only to keep out of harm's way, O'Sullivan here especially.

Clar. I'm afraid you'll miss your train.

Phil. Finish up——

Dav. I'm finished. Leave it to me to work out the details. After the mess you have made of this morning's business, I couldn't possibly leave it to you.

[*He nods at O'Sullivan.*]

O'Sull. I have no desire——

Dav. If I mess this affair, well, cut me out, the same as I've cut O'Sullivan out. Of course, the whole thing is quite irregular.

It's best you should know nothing about it officially.

O'Sull. The thing has not been decided at a meeting.

Phil. Are we or are we not the Strike Committee? Are we to see this strike through——

Dav. What are you talking about? My little affair is only a side show, something for the film—'tis your own description. Think it out when I'm gone. If any of you can discover any other way of recovering our self-respect, I'm willing to listen. Now, let ye blab if ye dare.

Clar. Well, well, this is intolerable. I will not stand it——

Dav. There is no other way. Think it out (*He prepares himself to go.*) I'll take some of these circulars. Where are these little Books of Rules?

[*He searches around.*]

Demp. There's not much chance of thinking out anything while you're here.

Dav. One word more.

[*He has his back towards them, still groping.*]

Phil. Only one!

Dav. Maybe you'll come to some decision

when I'm gone. Very well, decide against it. That will be best: it will leave the movement stainless. Yet the van will be smashed—and in the broad daylight, quite in the Manchester way! Of course, you can split, if you dare! Good-bye, me lads!

[He goes out.]

Demp. He's gone: let him. Now, our meeting.

Phil. One minute. Is he serious?

Demp. He thinks he is. It's all right. I know what we must do. Out in Blackpool, where I was reared, there was a wise old cobbler had a saying: "'Tisn't the man who trains the cock can fight the bird!" Very well. Davna has organised unskilled labour in this city. None of us could have done it. But 'tis done. Now, we must fight the bird. Phil, you're the man to do it.

[Clarke and O'Sullivan leap up excitedly, congratulating every one.]

Clar. What I was thinking about myself.

O'Sull. Phil, what did I suggest to you?

Phil. *(they are shaking his hand).* Hands off! hands off! Do you know what you're letting me in for?

Demp. It has to be done. Davna will run us on the rocks.

Phil. He's a bit mad, right enough. But you're leaving out the men: what'll they think of it?

Demp. I'm thinking of that. But we couldn't have a better opportunity: there's the kick-up with the railway men last night. Well, that's not a feather in Davna's cap, is it?

Phil. No, but then there's the trouble this morning——

Clar. Mr O'Sullivan, perhaps you don't know that there was a deputation of the men here in this room before you arrived?

O'Sull. Was there?

Clar. Yes. And I must say they felt exactly as Davna said. But Mr Dempsey and myself—well, I think we made an impression on them. [*He smiles fatuously.*]

Phil. With regard to Davna?

Clar. Oh, no, but with regard to violence in general. When they were going away they did not feel quite so certain of our "only weapon," as Davna said, as when they came in——

Phil. But you don't think they would allow Davna to be turned down?

Demp. But if we can show them it has to be done.

O'Sull. As it has.

Clar. If you consent, Phil, I'm prepared to fight this thing to the bitter end. If you don't—well, I go out. I won't even stay for this meeting now——

Phil. But it is hard on me. I see that Davna will run us on the rocks; but then I'm a friend of his, and it's only lately I'm beginning to understand him.

Demp. So are we all. Davna spoke of O'Sullivan here as pulling the prop from under his building—'tis Davna himself is pulling the prop from under it. Phil, you must prevent it. You must save him from himself. I ask you, Phil, because you're his dearest friend.

O'Sull. If you don't consent, well, I see no future—only collapse.

Phil. Yes, but it is not an easy thing to do at a moment's notice. I see he is going to wreck the whole scheme with that fiery breath of his. But all the same——

Demp. Of course, there are two sides to the picture. When you're as old as I am, you'll know that one has to make decisions before half the arguments on the other side have been settled with. 'Tis a rough and ready world—especially when there's a strike on.

Phil. I see that; but is it necessary to decide straight off?

Demp. The movement calls for it—the great movement Davna has built up—himself alone—he will destroy it if you don't step in and prevent him.

Phil. I see that; it is the one thing that tempts me.

Demp. Well, do it, in God's name.

O'Sull. Supposing we do the business we have to do at this meeting, and then return to this matter?

Phil. You'd all stick by me?

Demp. Have we any reason to do the other thing? We know we are asking you to do a hard thing.

Phil. The men who are not here?

Demp. Tim Murphy will be against us; as for the others, they don't count.

Phil. The man in gaol is a great difficulty.

O'Sull. What else could I have done?

Phil. Oh, it's done, that's accepted; but you see the difficulty?

O'Sull. But some of the men have admitted to me that there was nothing else to be done at the moment.

Phil. Yes, but if Davna does smash the van to-morrow, why, he'll be a hero.

Clar. But if he fails, as he failed last night?

Demp. There must be no attack on the van. *[They all look at him.]*

Phil. Davna isn't easily put off; and a bit of dare-devilry appeals to him.

Demp. One minute, now. Let us not be making difficulties. Clarke, your fellows have a general meeting to-night; well, we must make it serve a double purpose. We'll send round a call, and we'll have our fellows there as well as yours. After the business this morning they'll be anxious for a meeting. And I'll take it on myself to introduce Phil as our new organiser . . . they'll all know what that means.

Phil. Davna will be out of the city, and it will seem——

Clar. But he knows about our meeting to-night.

Phil. But how will they take—what you (to Dempsey) have said?

Demp. We'll see——

Clar. I'll have some men I can depend upon; they'll be ready. And we'll have a good many railway men there—and they're not too thankful to Davna for the dressing

down he gave them last night. Between the two——

Phil. Of course, he'll say I'm after stabbing him in the back.

Demp. Oh, 'tis something worse than that, he'll say. But then he has said so many things already about every one——

O'Sull. That's a fact; even the men are beginning to see through his big words.

Clar. You must put it to the meeting whether a committee can satisfy itself with a secretary who says he will not be bound by the decisions of that committee. . . . But we're here long enough: I feel myself growing stale from all these meetings. Is it necessary? I feel quite chilly.

O'Sull. (*goes to room door on the left, and opens it*). There's a fire here. We'd want that meeting, if only to—to strengthen my hands——

Clar. Very well. But let's get it over as quick as we can. We have a pleasant night's work before us.

Phil. I feel a bit wobbly.

[*They all move towards the door on the left.*]

Phil. (*suddenly stopping*). But this smash-

ing of the van. If he brings that off . . . ?
And we can't blab.

Demp. No; but we can prevent bloodshed.

[O'Sullivan enters the next room through the door on the left; he is heard moving chairs about.]

Take these books in, John.

[Dempsey hands some books to Clarke. Clarke enters the next room with them.]

Demp. Phil, there's a pen and ink there. A few words will prevent bloodshed. (Phil looks at him). Better do it.

Phil. (staring at him). Oh, no.

Demp. You'll do it. I ask you.

Phil. How could you, Dempsey? 'Tis terrible.

Demp. I know 'tis. I wouldn't ask another. He is always doing terrible things himself—unconscionable things.

Phil. Yes, but this——

Demp. 'Twill save the movement, and himself. Please do it. They are waiting.

Phil. But the end—how will it end?

Demp. How will smashing the van end—for Davna himself?

Phil. But there must be some other way——

Demp. There is not. Please do it. They're waiting for us.

Phil. How hard you're getting—I'm surprised!

Demp. Is there none of me in this movement? Is it all Davna's? I was in it twenty years before Cork ever heard of him. Write it. A sudden impulse mustn't be allowed to bring the whole thing to wreck and ruin.

Phil. For your sake I'll write it.

Demp. No, no! For the movement's sake.

Phil. (writing). There!

Demp. No names. No, no. I don't want to see it.

Phil. There are no names.

Demp. The mob will not justify it; but you have saved the movement.

[They go into the next room.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*A room behind the platform in the Athenæum Hall. The back scene represents a partition in which are two doors; these doors give on platform, which is not visible. At right and left are other doors; the door on left leads to a passage which gives on street: the door on right leads to store-rooms, etc.*

TIME.—*Same night.*

At rise of curtain the CARETAKER of the Hall is going to and fro, disappearing through and re-entering from one of the doors on the back. He is dressing the platform for a meeting. He is in shirt sleeves. JOHN DEMPSEY, well dressed, is standing nervously and awkwardly, watching the Caretaker. The Caretaker has once again entered from the back.

Demp. And what about this table?

Caretaker. I'll put it on. They always objects to it, and all the same 'tis sure to turn in handy before the night is out.

[He dusts the table.]

Demp. Very well. Where'll you put it?
The middle or the side?

Caretaker. The side. There.

[He flings the cloth away.]

Demp. Haven't you any cover for it?

Caretaker. I have: in the cupboard, with the decanter and the bell.

[He lifts the table and passes through door at back. Dempsey stands awkwardly awaiting his return. After a few seconds the Caretaker re-enters.]

Caretaker. I'll get the cover now.

Demp. You didn't open yet?

Caretaker. Man alive, 'tis too early yet!

Demp. 'Tis.

[The Caretaker rummages in a wall cupboard on the right. He brings out a faded tablecover, a decanter, a glass, a bell. As he comes across, the bell falls. Dempsey picks it up and hands it back to him.]

Demp. That's the bell?

Caretaker. Yes. They're getting old.

Demp. Isn't it loud enough?

Caretaker. The bell's all right; 'tis the cloth I mean. Take the decanter from me:

look at the colour 'tis. That's its natural colour.

[Dempsey holds decanter, not knowing what to do.]

Demp. 'Tis very yellow.

Caretaker. The water looks dirty in it. It reminds me of the streams in me own place : they do be brown from the turf.

Demp. Is that so?

Caretaker. Hold the glass too.

[He gives the glass to Dempsey, and then passes through door on the back. Dempsey holds decanter and glass, but his thoughts are obviously elsewhere. The Caretaker enters again.]

Caretaker. You're expecting a big crowd? Give me 'em now, and I'll rinse them.

[He goes out through the door on the right. Water is heard splashing. As he comes in again, Dempsey catches hold of a chair. The back comes off in his hand. He looks at it stupidly.]

Caretaker. Oh, that's one of the cripples. There's a good many like that. We have some rough nights here, I can tell you. *(Dempsey is trying to fit on back of chair.)*

Don't bother: 'tis better off: more of them will be doing the same. Where did I put that duster? Oh——

[He finds duster, and wipes glass with it.]

Caretaker (holding up decanter). Look at it. Just like the water out of a bog stream.

[He passes through the door on the back.]

Dempsey sits down. There is a knocking at street door. Dempsey stands up quickly, quite still for a moment. He walks swiftly, yet gently, towards door on the back, and calls in a whisper:

Demp. Larry! Lar!

Caretaker (entering; he runs into Dempsey). Oh, I didn't know you were there. Who's knocking? Are ye expecting anywan? What name? *(Calling out)* Hold hard, matey, hold hard. What the blazes——

Demp. O'Sullivan, a man named O'Sullivan.

[Knocking continues.]

Caretaker. O'Sullivan? Anywan else?

Demp. Clarke, a man named Clarke also.

Caretaker. 'Tis better keep out every one not wanting. This place always gets blocked up, even how many you keep out. *(Calling out)* Ah, shut up!

[He goes towards knocking.]

Caretaker (outside). Name? What's your name? "All right" is no name at all. Clarke. (*Calling in to Dempsey*) 'Tis Mr Clarke.

Enter JOHN CLARKE. He, too, is well dressed and very important looking. The Caretaker follows him.

Demp. Come in. Here I am.

Clar. You're early. Mighty hard to get in.

Demp. Perhaps I'm responsible for that. 'Tis better, isn't it?

Clar. Certainly. 'Twill be a big meeting; 'twill be a monster.

Demp. Do you think so? You're sure of your fellows?

Clar. They'll be all here—on account of this morning. And I'm sure of some of them. Phil likes a good crowd: it inspires him.

Demp. Everybody likes a big crowd.

[*The Caretaker goes on to platform again. Clarke and Dempsey talk more intimately.*]

Demp. How will they take it, do you think?

Clar. I only approached the men I was sure of. They didn't expect the change.

Demp. Even after last night?

Clar. No. But still they're not against it. They're so long walking about now, that any change is welcome.

Demp. Yes.

Clar. They have an idea that Davna is a born leader.

Demp. Yes, he excites them. Phil only keeps them in good humour. There's a great difference.

Clar. Yes, but they respect Phil. And they know that Davna makes mistakes through his cursed hot-headedness——

Demp. They don't seem to mind him making mistakes. That's the worst of it.

Clar. But the mess he's after making about the railway men is the worst yet——

Demp. A good job we didn't force that secretaryship on Phil. If we did, we would have no one now to fill the gap.

Clar. And he'll fill it well. I'm certain he'll do more credit to the higher position than he would do to the lower. He's a big man; he has been always playing second fiddle: now we'll see what he's made of. 'Tis a momentous night.

Demp. He has his speech very well arranged: if he can bring it off just as he intends, it ought to make a great impression.

We thought it best to face the Tobin business fair and square. He'll sympathise with Tobin, but he'll defend O'Sullivan's action: he'll attribute his action to the education he got in the movement—our movement. He'll show them that O'Sullivan's soldier-like quickness of decision tests the movement——

Clar. A very good point.

Demp. Whether we're a mob or a disciplined army.

Clar. Very good indeed. But the smashing of the van?

Demp. Well, he'll go on to condemn violence in general terms. He'll put it to them like this: If we're a disciplined army, violence—little bursts of unpremeditated violence—are out of the question. But if we're only a mob——

Clar. Then the question of change of leadership?

Demp. Well, to tell you the truth, he leaves that to me.

Clar. (surprised). 'Tis very good of you to undertake it. You see a way ahead? You think they'll, they'll—not cut up rough?

Demp. We must do our best, that's all. It's time for us to assert ourselves.

Clar. Anyway, they'll take it better from

you than from anyone else. After all, 'twas you got the movement hitched on to Davna.

Demp. 'Twas. I don't regret it, but I regret having to switch it off now; however, it has to be done. His ideas have come to the boiling point. [Caretaker enters.

Demp. You have everything ready now?

Caretaker. I have. Maybe you'd take a look yourself now, or you, sir?

Demp. Oh, you know best.

[Clarke goes to the door on the back, and looks through.

Clar. That table, wouldn't you put it in the centre? It's not in the centre, is it?

Caretaker. It do be never in the centre.

Clar. I always thought it was.

Caretaker. Not in this hall. It's like this (*from his manner of speech it is evident that he has often given this explanation before*): Maybe you often saw a speaker on a platform, and he always getting right in front of the chairman? Maybe you did?

Clar. Well, I did.

Caretaker. And then when he has to say something to the chairman or about the chairman, well, he has to twist his head about to see him, very awkward—and then

he's in a cruel state, trying to keep one eye on the chairman and one on the meeting. Now, why is that? [*They give no answer. The table!* It's all on account of the table. They always puts it in the middle, whereas if they put it to one side, like me, such a thing wouldn't happen at all. Very few people know how to dress a platform. I once knew a clerk of a chapel used to be dressing the high altar—and he couldn't dress it, so help me, he couldn't, so he came to me——

Clar. Yes, yes (*to Dempsey*). Don't you think we might open?

Demp. Very well. Have you the men ready?

Clar. Yes. I'll go out to them.

[*Caretaker disappears once more through door on the back with a brush in his hand.*

Demp. Very well. You have instructed them all right?

Clar. Oh, yes. I'll be back immediately. Fasten this door after me——

[*They both go out through door on left. The place is vacant for a second. Then Caretaker and Dempsey return, Dempsey from door on*

the left, and Caretaker from the back; the latter has a brush, a chair, and a bucket.

Caretaker. Now, the ship's ready for ye.

Demp. Thanks. Have you any idea of what the men think of this Tobin business? Some of them don't approve of our new secretary's action in having him arrested?

Caretaker. Approve! (*he whistles a long note*).

Demp. They disapprove?

Caretaker (*suddenly interested*). Your new sec. won't be here to-night, will he?

Demp. He will.

Caretaker. But you won't—you won't let him show his nose outside that door?

[He nods towards the back.

Demp. There might be a row?

Caretaker. Oh, it's nothing to me, not a ha'p'orth. Only the damage must be paid for. You know that, of course?

[There is a knocking outside.

Who's this?

Demp. That's Mr Clarke again.

[Caretaker goes out through the door on the left and admits Clarke.

Demp. Well, everything's all right?

Clar. Perfect, up to this, anyway. They're

waiting at the doors. We'll have a great many railway men present, and they're very sore after last night.

Re-enter CARETAKER. He now has on an official cap and coat.

We'll go and open the doors now.

Caretaker. As you wish.

[Both pass through the door on back.

Dempsey is by himself. He listens for sound of feet in the Hall. Clarke and Caretaker soon return by same door.

Demp. They're coming in?

Clar. Nicely; and a good number of railway men, as I thought.

[There is knocking again at the door.

Caretaker. Am I to open?

Demp. Ask who's there. If 'tis O'Sullivan, let him in. (To Clarke.) If 'tis O'Sullivan, he'd better stop in here till we find how things are going.

[The Caretaker goes out at the left.

Caretaker (outside). Mr Kennedy——

Demp. Oh, that's all right. Admit him.

Clar. Phil!—that's good.

Enter PHIL. He is very excited-looking.

Demp. Welcome.

Phil. They're pouring in like mad. They

seemed to me very quiet—too quiet. Hope I won't get stage fright.

Clar. You're looking splendid.

Phil. I'm not feeling splendid. I have a queer feeling on me. All the eyes staring at me—I never felt like this before——

Clar. Of course not; you weren't playing the leading part.

Demp. And you must play it well. I will put your price high. You must play up to it.

Phil. Thanks; but things are so mixed up. And Davna and I were such friends. I feel in a sort of dream.

Clar. You mustn't be dwelling on that. This is a *coup*. The Swan of Avon says: "There's a tide in the affairs of men . . ." you know the lines.

Demp. 'Tis hard for you, Phil. I can understand it. But every movement calls for such sacrifices. No doubt after a short time Davna will learn sense.

Phil. Yes, yes; but it looks like rounding on a chum.

Clar. Keep your mind on your speech: that's the all-important thing to-night.

Phil. The speech is all right—if I can keep a hold on myself. But this attack on the van to-morrow: if that comes

off—well, Davna is in the saddle again. And how will I look?

Demp. (looking at him sharply). How can it come off?

Phil. Oh, yes, I understand. I have taken every precaution, certainly. And yet what I have done—perhaps 'tis that more than anything else is—is making me uneasy. I am uneasy (*he speaks earnestly*); I wish 'twas all over.

Demp. You have done your duty, nothing else.

Phil. Look here; I'll break down in my speech if I suddenly remember certain nights I spent with Davna—certain things he said to me.

Clar. What nonsense, Phil. Pull yourself together. [*The Caretaker comes in.*]

Caretaker. There's a lot of men leaving the hall. Listen. [*They listen.*]

Clar. What's the meaning of it?

Caretaker. 'Tis the railway men are leaving. They're all whispering, too.

Demp. You're sure?

Caretaker. Yes, I am. And they only just after coming in! 'Tis funny.

[*There is a knocking outside. The Caretaker makes to open.*]

Demp. Be careful. Get the name. If 'tis O'Sullivan——

Caretaker. Right.

[*The Caretaker goes out at left.*]

Clar. I don't understand it. They were crowding in just now.

Caretaker (outside). Mr O'Sullivan.

[*O'Sullivan comes in.*]

Demp. Come in, Jim. Any news?

O'Sull. Good-night all. A curious thing: that Tim Murphy wants to know point-blank if there's a seat on the platform for him? I said I'd ask you.

Clar. But his crowd were invited, and we got no answer from them.

Demp. Where is he?

O'Sull. Very lonely looking: standing with his back to the wall down the street—near Spillane's.

Demp. Tell him, no! He can attend as a member of the public if he chooses, but in the body of the hall, like anyone else.

Clar. Quite right.

O'Sull. I'm to tell him that?

Demp. Yes.

O'Sull. Oh, I also heard that the railway men are holding a special meeting. They're trooping back to their rooms.

Phil. A meeting? I don't like that.

Clar. That explains why they're leaving.

O'Sull. Well, I'll tell him that. I expect he'll just give a snarl out of him.

[*O'Sullivan goes out at the left.*]

Demp. Get back soon. Tell the Caretaker to shut that door after you.

O'Sull. (outside). Very well.

Phil. He said Tim is very lonely looking: I used to enjoy him so much. And Davna loves him. You have no idea how Davna would talk to the two of us.

Clar. (sarcastically). Yes, he used to fall back on you like some old Roman emperor on his heads of cabbage——

Phil. Maybe so. Davna suffers from loneliness, too. He keeps on recalling the days of his youth on the sea coast. I do really think he suffers from loneliness—he says he does, anyhow.

Clar. Loneliness! Nonsense, he's an awful romancer.

Phil. Maybe so. And another thing he's always harping on—a day will come and he'll be turned down——

Clar. Not a day, a night—say a night,
Phil.

Demp. Well, that day comes to everyone

—high and low. It came to O'Connell, to Parnell, to Redmond——

Phil. That's exactly how he looks at it!

Clar. And when the tragic day comes, what's his programme?

Phil. To read all the poetry ever written! He told me so.

Clar. Too much of it he's read already.

[Knocking outside; the Caretaker calls in "Mr O'Sullivan."]

Demp. Right! Show him in. We'll have something sharp from old Tim, I daresay——

[Suddenly the Caretaker is heard shouting, "I will not." "Keep out." "Get back." "Let me shut the door." Noise and confusion. Dempsey shouts, "Keep 'em out; shut it." Other shouts are heard from many voices. Then a crowd of rough-looking men, armed with sticks, rush in excitedly.]

Demp. What's up? Who are you?

Phil. Who sent you? By whose orders——

Clar. Unheard-of rowdyism—rowdyism.

1st Man. Quiet. Keep quiet. There's more outside. Keep quiet, can't ye.

Demp. But who sent you? We've a right to know?

1st Man (to another). Take the door you, you too. Riordan, take that one you.

3rd Man. Who sent us? He'll be here himself to tell ye. Are you all right? And you? Good!

[He questions his men in a loud whisper.

Phil. We'll see about this.

1st Man. Keep quiet. Don't upset the meeting. They're nice and quiet——

Phil. But you're after upsetting it already——

[Davna rushes in excitedly. The men guard all the doors, two at each.

Dav. (exultingly). Beautiful! Beautiful! Good-night to ye. Are the doors secure? That's right. Not a hitch. Dempsey, you look quite upset. You, Clarke, you're not at ease, I can see you're not. And Phil!—our own Phil—why, you're green!

Demp. We want an explanation——

Phil. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Dav. All in good time, Phil. (To his men.) But look at them, boys! Look at them. Ugh!—they make my flesh creep—vipers, adders! Oh you slugs—all of you! Backyard worms!

Phil. (blazing up). What do you mean?

Dav. That's two of them wanting an explanation. What about you, Clarke?

Clar. They speak for me. We're all in the one boat, and I may say——

[He stops himself.]

Dav. May say—what?

Clar. That it will take a cleverer man than you to rouse the spirit of mutiny in that boat!

Dav. What a master of language! But you all look so flustered. Compose yourselves, or you'll all make an unedifying appearance on the platform——

Demp. You have brought our movement down to this——

[He indicates the bludgeon men.]

Dav. Our movement! My movement, John, my movement.

Phil. What's here of it is yours right enough—footpads! Have you no shame?

Dav. Footpads! That's just it—I thank you, Jew!

Phil. Let me tell you, violence of this kind——

Dav. Again I thank you—footpads!—violence! You're on the right track. You, gentlemen, you follow your leader?

Demp. This hall is ours for the night: we have hired it.

Dav. For a meeting—and a meeting we'll have.

Clar. Don't bandy words with him.

Dav. Why confess defeat, master of language?

Phil. We'll have our meeting when you and your footpads——

Dav. There 'tis again—the word that is music in my ears! Footpads, violence: why, that's us! That's our name all right. Brute force! Bless you, there's no art, no skill in us. We labour without implements. Those of the bronze age, the stone age, would do us all right. We're lower than machinery at its lowest—a drag, a winch, a pile-driver is not so low as we are—we, mere bodies, mere drags, mere winches! Implements of no skill! Only mere implements of violence!

Phil. (*looking at the bludgeon men*). Implements of violence—I thank you, Jew!

Dav. Yes, sir! We exist for and have our being in violence. (*He turns to his men.*) Am I talking too loud?

1st Man. It's all right. They're all talking and smoking.

[*He peeps through door at the back.*]

Dav. It doesn't matter. It will only tune them up—a sort of overture to what's to come.

Phil. We ask you once again, for the sake of the movement, to take away your footpads.

Dav. (taking no notice). My implements of violence, you mean. The extraordinary thing is: all the days of our lives we, unskilled labourers, must be violent to live: our week's wages depends on it: the more capable of violence we are, the more efficient we are. We must drag and tug, and twist and hoist, and swing and wrench, and shove and drive—but when we're on strike, all that violence which is in us, our fortune—all that we must close down, must bottle up. Extraordinary, I call it!

1st Man. Give it to 'em, captain! The twisters!

Dav. The very time, the only time we have leisure to brood upon our terrible lives—then we must be as astral bodies, mute and uncomplaining!

1st Man. Ah!

Dav. Those gentlemen-at-arms (*he indicates his men*) have been picketing the ships, the shipping offices, all day—counting the

long hours, looking into one another's hungry eyes, finding out by doing so that every man was thinking the same thoughts as every other man—and yet, in spite of all this, they must go nicely about their striking!

[*Phil makes to move. Davna roars at him.*

Don't stir! To go about our striking daintily—'tis not alone to throw away our one weapon—violence—'tis to throw away our very selves, to betray our nature, to live the puppet. My God! It won't be done!

[*He takes a few steps, his fist raised over Dempsey's head; he suddenly gets hold of himself, shakes himself and says:*

My footpads, I have justified you!

Demp. You're on the wrong side of the partition: the platform is on the other side.

Dav. I want to convert you first. I can't work with non-believers. I never could.

Phil. Do you refuse us liberty for our meeting?

Dav. The fact is: You, or your secretary O'Sullivan rather, have taught me all this. Only for that Spartan mother. . . . But why go into it? Like a poet who has a hundred

misty thoughts fluttering around in his cranium, all hanging on to one another, yet lacking the touch of fire that would fuse them all into one poem—my thoughts were all—all—in the air! At loose! Wobbly! Only for that Spartan mother I might never have felt that fiery thrill that—that *clanged* them all into one resounding word—violence! [*He makes a great gesture.*]

Phil. I have asked you: have we liberty to go our own way?

Dav. My footpads, I have justified the mother of you all—violence!

Clar. I'm glad you have expressed yourself so plainly——

Dav. Plainly! Have I? I'm so glad!

Clar. . . . because it justifies our every action——

Demp. Why not have said all this before you brought the men out?

Dav. How could I say what wasn't revealed?

Phil. Bunkum! Only for your failure to carry the railway men with you last night there would be no need for all this oratory: you're covering up defeat with the big drum——

Dav. My failure last night—see, my foot-

pads are laughing! But who said bunkum? Where does my logic fail?

Phil. We thought *you* despised logic; you often said so.

Dav. I despise the logic that leaves out human nature; mine doesn't; mine is quite a bloodthirsty affair—as bloodthirsty as a famished wolf or eagle. What did the gentle Faber say?—"The poor are God's eagles." And how does an eagle come at its bit of grub, gentlemen? (*He croaks and grabs with his hand.*) Like that! My foot-pads, I have justified your talons—I mean your bludgeons!

Clar. We would prefer to see you justify your presence here, in a hall you haven't hired.

Dav. Have a small bit of sense! All this that I am saying to you is only a sort of, sort of prelude—to what I'm going to say to your meeting outside.

Demp. (*earnestly*). No, Davna, you will not!

Dav. But I will!

Demp. Do you never cast a thought on what it may all lead to—this crying up of violence?

Dav. Why, it is all for the future I work.

It is you who will not work for the future. If the golden age is anywhere, it is in the future. Surely you'll admit that! And the golden age is like heaven—only the violent bear it away. I am convinced of this: only violence will unlock the future! I will explain: In this city, as in every other city, lies a vicious mass of almost entirely uneducated men—ill-born, ill-bred, ill-reared, ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-housed, without traditions, without class-consciousness, without stability, without a dream! And society, if you please, takes no notice of it—plays its piano in the winter evenings, all serene, as if there was no such thing as a slum in existence! Well, gentlemen, violence alone will make society cry out: "What's up?" And violence alone, continued day after day, will make society get rid of that mass of uneducated violence that is in its midst. See, I'm as conservative as a priest who has got a good parish. I will bring in the age of law and order. I will force society to bring it in, by blowing up society.

[Knocking outside.]

If that's Tim Murphy, let him in. 'Tis the pity of the world he should miss all this, and be a man with as keen a mind as any of us!

[The Caretaker shouts in "Mr O'Sullivan and Tim Murphy."

Send them in.

Enter MURPHY and O'SULLIVAN.

There is a short silence.

Mur. (comically). 'I'm very pleased to see ye all so quiet and neighbourly-like.

[O'Sullivan goes from one to another, seeking for an explanation.

Dav. We're having a little quaker's meeting. We're preparing a programme for the boys outside. (He nods his head towards the back.) If this mass of barbarism cannot be kept quiet, as feudalism kept it quiet, by the knout—if it is exploding day after day—isn't it obvious that society will begin to end it? Tell me this: Has a serious attempt ever been made to educate the masses?

[He waits for an answer: there is none.

Dav. That is what we have to work for. Education and more education and more education; decent education. I begin to-night. I want an education that will be surrounded by golden fields, by pictures and music, and buttressed by decent homes—roomy and airy and sunny; leisurely education, with time to think and time to grow. Education of the spirit that will lead to

vision and the daring that follows it, and not to the efficiency of the hot and cold water-taps of the bathroom—and the cowardliness that follows it. And the education must be kept up until no man will be found debased enough to use his back for bagging corn, or his bleeding shoulder blades for flinging deals about.

Phil. And will you say that to the boys outside?

Dav. Of course I will.

Clar. Somebody must fling the deals about.

Dav. Nobody must fling deals about with his bleeding shoulder blades. What have we machinery for? Let machinery fling them about.

Phil. Will you say that to the meeting outside?

Dav. Certainly! I am going to educate them.

Phil. They are against machinery.

Dav. Why wouldn't they—at present—when they can hardly compete with it—at its lowest? But I work for the future, when society will be wise enough to reserve its mankind for doing such work as machinery cannot do. See now?

Phil. I'm afraid the men won't see.

Dav. Well, 'tis a long way off. But at present the thing we have to remember is: Only by education can society draw their fangs—our fangs. And only by snapping at it will we force society to begin. We are ready to submit to the operation. I long to be laid up in lavender. Tim Murphy here longs to be wrapped in the tissue-paper of luxury!

Mur. Lord! Lord!—like a silvery spoon!

Phil. A last time I ask you, have we permission to hold our meeting?

Dav. I'm going to hold a meeting here to-night. I don't know what you're going to do!

Phil. But 'tis ours——

Dav. Violence usurps!

Phil. This meeting is ours. If you go through that door, I stay behind.

Demp. So do we all. You will do terrible mischief.

Dav. I am going out on that platform——

Phil. Very well, we go elsewhere.

[*They make a move towards the door at left. Davna springs after them, grabbing Phil by the shoulder.*]

Dav. I must justify the programme of

violence I had arranged for to-morrow, and you must justify the means you have taken to prevent it. There! Since you won't join me. *[They all start.*

Phil. What do you mean?

Dav. Come out on the platform. (*Outside in the hall there is a low sound of stamping feet.*) See, they grow impatient.

Phil. You're laying a trap. (*To the others.*) Don't go with him.

Demp. I'll go on the platform if you allow me to speak when you're done.

Dav. Certainly. As for Phil, I know what's up with him: his evil conscience!

Phil. I have no evil conscience.

Dav. You have, Phil. You know you have. See how Dempsey here didn't hesitate for a moment.

Phil. I haven't. (*Raging.*) And if you persist——

Dav. I do persist. (*To the others*) Gentlemen, this comrade of ours has betrayed us: he has broken our vow of secrecy!

Phil. There was no vow!

Dav. I put you on your honour.

Clar. What vow? I am not conscious of any vow——

Demp. There was nothing like a vow.

Dav. There was.

Phil. I gave no consent whatever.

Dav. Don't quibble. I put you all on your honour. It was understood between us. You alone broke the understanding.

Phil. I defy you. I did nothing wrong.

Dav. We'll see about that. Gentlemen: this poor feckless creature here went and informed the police——

Phil. I went near no police.

Dav. . . . by letter that the prison van was to be smashed to-morrow.

Phil. You're only guessing.

Dav. A good thing for you if I were.

Phil. I deny it.

Dav. I have your very words—the very words you wrote.

Phil. How could you?

Demp. What a nonsensical charge!

Dav. Violence usurps! I'll read out your very words——

Clar. If you did this, Phil, I'm proud of you—you're a man of great moral courage.

Dav. Yes, but he won't face the men. Come out. It's better I should read it for the men.

Mur. O Phil, you never did the like!

Demp. We don't know what you're talking about.

Dav. Yet Phil refuses to face the meeting.

Mur. Davna, don't say Phil Kennedy did the dirty work—he was a good boy always——

Phil. I did no dirty work——

Dav. Here's what he did, Tim (*reading*): "In the event of the man, Tobin, being conveyed to the Court to-morrow in the usual manner, it is not unlikely that an attack will be made on the van."

Mur. I don't believe it, Davna; Phil never wrote it.

Phil. I did write it. But where's the dirty work in it? I did what I thought right.

Clar. Perfectly right; we're proud of you.

Dav. Very well; he admits it. Come out on the platform, then.

Demp. I said he couldn't justify it to a mob——

Dav. A mob!

Phil. And I don't intend to try. You sneaked the letter, you, or your spies in the Post Office. You're a sneak——

Dav. Ah! And you're a traitor. Which is the worse? We'll leave it to the meeting.

Mur. O Phil! Phil!

Phil. What's the "Phil, Phil" about?

Dav. Come out, or I'll drag you out——

[He grips Phil.]

Phil. Hands off, sneak!

Dav. Face the music—come along.

[They separate.]

Phil. 'Tis on a level with the rest—
sneaks and footpads——

Dav. Come along out. Let the meeting
judge between us. Clear the door there.
I'll drag him out. Traitor! Scab!

Phil. Say that again.

Dav. Scab!

Phil. Am I? *[He rushes at Davna.]*

Dav. Hold awhile. Right you are. *(He
breaks away and throws off his coat.)* Hold
that. Now! *[He flings his coat to Tim Murphy.]*

Phil. *(flinging off his coat.)* I'll beat blazes
out of you.

Dav. Stand back, all of ye.

[They spar at each other]

Clar. Phil, put on your coat. Don't
lower yourself.

1st Man. Give 'em room.

Mur. *(sarcastically).* Don't stain your
noble paw, Phil——

Dav. Ready? Come on.

[They dance around.]

Mur. Go! Captain, watch his left—
watch it.

Dav. Right, my famulus.

Mur. His left, damn you, his left!

2nd Man. Back up yer man, one of ye.

Fair play——

O'Sull. 'Tis shameful! Shameful!

Demp. Come out, Phil——

Phil. Not till I quieten him for ever.

[They rush and clinch.]

Mur. Break! Break! Break, I'm telling ye——

[On separating, Clarke is nearly knocked down.]

1st Man. Can't ye keep out the way——

[The fighters spar again.]

Mur. Watch him, watch him. *(They rush.)* Cover up! Cover up!

[They separate.]

Dav. Mind that coat . . . don't be swinging it. . . . Only God knows what's in . . . in . . . ah! . . . in the pockets. Take that.

[He gives Phil a good slog.]

1st Man. Good!

Caretaker (rushing in). Lord! Lord!
Take the brush out the way!

2nd Man. Back him up, wan of ye; what good are ye?

Mur. Good Lord, 'twas a daisy clout, that was . . . ah . . . keep into him.

[The men clinch.]

Phil. (surprises Davna, and pommels him).
There! How's that?

Dav. Hardly Queensberry! Take that, you.
[He gets Phil on the jaw. Outside, from the hall, comes the sound of stamping feet.]

O'Sull. How will we face the men after this?

Dav. Keep the doors shut.

Mur. 'Tis hard: they're missing it all!

[The fighters are sparring.]

Phil. Come on, can't you. What are you dancing for?

Dav. You're fat and scant of breath—that's how 'tis. Now—— *[They clinch.]*

Caretaker. Mind the partition—keep the middle—that's safe.

1st Man. Good! Good!

2nd Man. Me little tar! You got him——

Clar. Gentlemen, isn't that enough—Mr Dempsey——

[Outside, louder stamping of feet and loud whistling.]

Dav. (sparring). They want . . . the curtain . . . up——

Mur. 'Tis a shame, 'tis a shame. Come out on the platform. Cover up—watch—watch!

[Davna continues dancing round Phil, who becomes more and more angry.]

O'Sull. Shameful! Shameful!

Phil. Stand your ground, damn you.

1st Man. You're doing nice—take no notice of him.

Caretaker. The clock—keep out—keep out.

Dav. Brains, Phil, brains!

[Phil gets a good rap off him.]

Phil. Violence, old son!

Demp. That's enough. I'm going out on the platform.

[Stamping and roaring in hall.]

O'Sull. We're down in the dust—we're disgraced.

Dav. Hold the gates—don't let him out.

Mur. Stop the gab, Captain, and watch your man.

Demp. (to the men at the door on back). Open the door—let me out.

1st Man. Sit down out o' that: is it a schoolmaster you are?

[Another man comes behind Dempsey and makes him sit on a chair.]

Mur. That's right!

Caretaker. They'll pull down the clock.

Dav. Clear out, you spongers!

[In a sudden whirl the fighters scatter the others all over the stage. The bout continues for some seconds, the onlookers darting from corner to corner. In the end Davna lifts Phil off his feet and flings him to the ground. All the time there is a stamping of feet, whistling, and cries from the background. Clarke goes to Phil's assistance.]

Dav. (winded). Now . . . *(He tries to catch his breath.)* Now . . . Ferdia . . . the third day's fighting begins . . . Come!

Mur. That's enough, men. There's two of you in the ring. That's plain——

[Murphy is holding Davna back; Clarke and O'Sullivan are doing as much for Phil.]

Phil. No—let me go! Come on, you braggart!

Mur. Now, now. Hold him, men. He's a good boy.

Demp. Give it up. Hear them outside.

[There is the sound of great stamping outside.]

Phil. Let me go!

[Phil and Davna rush at each other again. After some tussling, Davna again flings Phil. Both are quite winded. Tim Murphy puts Davna into a chair and wipes his face with a handkerchief. Clarke picks up Phil and does the same for him.]

Dav. The Gae . . . (*puffing*).

Mur. Shut up——

Dav. The Gae Bulg! Gentlemen! No fault, Phil—no fault. You weren't reared in the school I was reared in. Water, Tim.

Mur. (*to Caretaker*). Water, you staring rabbit!

*[Caretaker goes quickly out for water
Great noise in background.]*

Dav. Ah . . . hear them! One moment, my poor chicks, and I'll be with you.

Mur. Can't you shut up and rest yourself.

Dav. How's Phil?

Mur. Will you shut up! Here.

*[The Caretaker brings a glass of water.
Murphy holds it to Davna's lips.
He drinks some.]*

Dav. The rest . . . to Ferdia. (*The Caretaker takes glass and doesn't know what*

to do with it.) Go on—you simpleton! Look at him there on the chair—winded.

[Caretaker takes the water to Phil.

Phil knocks it about the place.

Dav. Oh, Ferdia! Ferdia!

[He suddenly springs up and makes towards Phil.

Dav. Look here, Phil—give us your paw—'tis a noble paw.

Phil. No.

Dav. No—is it?

Mur. *(coming in front of Davna).* Give the lad time. Sit down.

Dav. *(to Caretaker).* Bring us a pan of water and a towel.

Caretaker. Lord! He'll put us all in his pocket!

[He goes out for water. Murphy is quieting Davna.

Dav. I'm all right. Don't be pawing me! They'll not notice anything from the floor. Tim Leahy . . . one time was addressing a meeting . . . he had a black eye. . . . O Lord! I'm winded——

[He sits down. Caretaker brings water and towel. He takes towel, dips it in the water, and bathes his face.

Dav. And yesterday, Tim, we were

talking about the woodlands and the streams! Oh, if only this life of noise and bustle would cease, and let my real life begin—a life of quiet thought.

Mur. Ah, don't be silly. If you go out you'll have to keep a hold on your tongue, Captain.

Dav. I will. Phil has saved himself. And so have I. . . . I was afraid of myself . . . thought I had lost my violence. Ah, hear them . . . noble beasts! Noble beasts! They sniff the battle from afar!

Mur. Be very careful. God only knows what you'd say and you like that.

Dav. I will. Well, Dempsey, are you satisfied?

Demp. I'd be glad if your people would allow me to pass out——

Dav. All in good time.

Demp. After what I've seen——

Dav. A little scrap! Nonsense! But how we took to it! That's a noble beast there on the chair. I have the greatest respect for it. Ah, Dempsey, violence is not educated out of us yet! 'Tis a pity. And yet it can be done, if only a serious effort was made. (*There is now great noise in background.*) Noble beasts! Noble beasts!

All noble beasts, how they roar in the night! (*He stands up.*) Come on, gather up, gather up, we're going to have a slashing meeting. I'll give the serfs a few splendid moments—and by such do we live!

Demp. Mind what you say to them.

Dav. I'll hammer it into them what a disgraceful thing it is for us—men—to be content to get through life like worms and grubs, instead of marching through it like men with a noble past and a nobler future. I have a thousand things to say to them. That's the least.

Mur. Now, lad, be very careful, very careful.

Dav. I'll implore them to tell me how often in the year they lay their eyes on a wide sweep of landscape—drinking it into a mind not fuddled with drink after a cheap excursion. I'll ask them how often their children play on the daisied grass under the green boughs, and how often they play in the stinking bedrooms of the tenements. Are they never, while their little souls are open and soft, never to watch the birds gathering to the bushes at the fall of night? Never to hear great waters falling from rock to rock——O Tim, I've a soul seething

with it. There's something worth fighting for, if only they would see it.

Mur. There's a strike on, lad! Don't forget!

Dav. Dempsey, there must be violence: nothing else will get them to draw our fangs.

Demp. Then I can't go with you. As well first as last.

Clar. Neither can I.

Dav. Well, then—passage, my mates—there's the door. What about you, Phil?

Phil. No.

Dav. No! Very well.

[Outside, there is a sudden and sustained burst of applause. It thrills Davna.]

Dav. Ha! Hear that! Hear that! What does that mean? The railway men have joined us—the sleepers have risen from their slumbers like lions refreshed! Hear them! Hear them! the railway men—the men that keep the world spinning—spinning.

[He is greatly excited; he leaps around the place from man to man.]

Hear them, Dempsey! You, Clarke—the wheels are going round—the big wheels and the little wheels. Come out, Tim, 'tis you'll

be chairman of this gaff—we'll have a meeting that will rouse the world. But you'll all come.

[The noise outside becomes so great that his voice cannot be heard; his mouth is gaping; he gesticulates wildly; he leaps from one to another, grabbing at them with fierce hands.]

Come, Dempsey!

[Dempsey draws away from him.]

Come, Clarke!

[Clarke draws away from him. He stops suddenly quite still for a moment. The meeting outside is heard singing "The Red Flag." He stretches his hand towards the partition, and addresses Clarke, Dempsey, and O'Sullivan, who are grouped together.]

Don't you see, old men, and little men: It is not given you to lead them!

[He shouts the words with intense conviction.]

Phil. (leaping to his feet). 'Tis true! 'tis true! Davna, I'm with you, I'm with you to the end.

[He grips Davna's hand for a second,

then breaks fiercely away and flings himself upon Dempsey threateningly.

Look here, John Dempsey, only you're an old man I'd flatten you up against that wall and break your face.

[Dempsey staggers away, groping for a chair.]

Dav. Phil! Phil!

Phil. *(To Davna, gesturing towards Dempsey.)* He flung me against you. It wasn't fair; it wasn't fair to me, to you.

[Dempsey sits down, covering his face.]

Dav. It was they made you write it——

Phil. It was. . . . No. . . . I'm wrong. I was weak. I shouldn't have done it. I was to take your place. Forgive me.

Dav. Ah, they chose well. They saw the difference between you and O'Sullivan—between you and themselves. You they put up against me: and now you're with me. Say it, Phil, say it.

Phil. I'm with you; and it isn't Phil the playboy is with you either.

Dav. Ah! Ah! There's the beginning of the end! It doesn't matter. There's a year to go. Maybe two! Six! I'll have a band about me by that time—men more on

my own level. You're the first of them, Phil. And that little band—one of them will push me from my chair——

Mur. What are you saying?

Phil. Do you mean that I——

Dav. . . . you, or some other that I will have raised up, will push me from my chair. It doesn't matter. It's all for the best. And there's always Mount Melleray. Come on, Phil; I must carry on. I go to lead my people, while 'tis given me. As for you (*he turns towards Dempsey and the others*), you are numbered with the dead. Don't dare to follow me, any of you. (*He makes for the door in the partition.*) You, Phil, first. Tim, you now. Now, you men.

[Phil, Tim Murphy, and Davna's followers pass quickly through the partition, Davna himself last. He is received with tremendous applause. Dempsey, Clarke, and O'Sullivan remain on the stage, silent and defeated. Curtain falls quickly.]

CURTAIN



THE LABOUR LEADER

This Play was produced for the first time in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on Sept. 30th, 1919, with the following cast :

Tim Murphy

John Clarke

Mrs. Donovan

John Dempsey

Dan O'Rielly

Jack O'Donoghue

Battie Donovan

Phil Kennedy

David Lombard

James O'Sullivan

Mrs. Tobin

Caretaker

Quay Labourers

HUGH NAGLE

GEORGE ST. JOHN

MARGARET NICHOLLS

PETER NOLAN

M. J. DOLAN

W. FITZGERALD

HUBERT MAGUIRE

F. J. MCCORMACK

PAUL FARRELL

ERIC GORMAN

MAUREEN DELANY

M. J. DOLAN

{ BRIAN HERBERT,
R. C. MURRAY,
A. QUINN, &c.

The Play was produced by LENNOX ROBINSON.

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